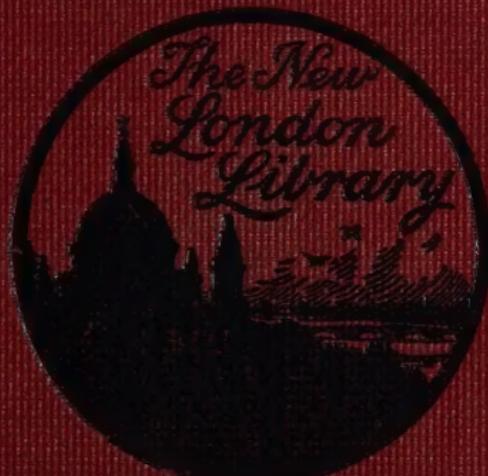


THE UNDERWOOD MYSTERY

CHARLES J. DUTTON



Sam. H. Clough.

June 1922.

THE UNDERWOOD MYSTERY

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THE UNDERWOOD MYSTERY

BY
CHARLES J. DUTTON



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	AN INTERRUPTED GAME	9
II.	THE DEAD MAN SITTING THERE	13
III.	CLUES THAT ARE ASHES	21
IV.	A POOR PLACE TO HIDE A GUN	28
V.	A FIGHT IN THE DEATH CHAMBER	35
VI.	ROBERT UNDERWOOD COMES HOME	47
VII.	THE PROBE OF THE LAW	59
VIII.	A WOMAN ENTERS	76
IX.	WHO BOUGHT THE REVOLVER ?	87
X.	WHY DO MEN DREAM ?	96
XI.	FIGURES IN A RED BOOK	105
XII.	IT WAS JOHN UNDERWOOD'S CAR	110
XIII.	FOG SHROUDED VOICES	121
XIV.	THE POLICE DECIDE	129
XV.	THE CLEVEREST PLANNED MURDER	141
XVI.	SPILLED TOBACCO AND STOLEN PEARLS.	153
XVII.	THE LADY LOSES HER TEMPER	163
XVIII.	A WILL THAT WAS NOT DRAWN	175
XIX.	THE DEAD MAN TELLS HIS SECRET	187
XX.	MRS. UNDERWOOD DECIDES TO TALK	194
XXI.	A WIDOW WHO WAS NOT A WIFE	206
XXII.	THE DRAMATIST ALSO TALKS	219
XXIII.	THE LAST WORDS OF JOHN UNDERWOOD	230
XXIV.	FATE CHEATS THE LAW	244

To

MY TEN YEAR OLD SON

ODARD DUTTON

WHO SAYS

"A FELLOW'S FATHER OUGHT TO
DEDICATE HIS FIRST BOOK
TO HIS SON"

THE UNDERWOOD MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

AN INTERRUPTED GAME

JOHN BARTLEY, in preparation for a difficult drive, was trying the swing of his various golf clubs when a man, whom I had previously noted hurrying across the links, came up and interrupted him.

"Are you John Bartley of New York?" asked the stranger jerkily, between his rapid breaths.

"I am," said Bartley. "What can I do for you?"

"My name is Sullivan," said the man. "I am the prosecuting attorney of this district. I just came from the telegraph office where I went to send a telegram to you in New York. The operator told me that you were actually at hand—spending your vacation I presume—it is most fortunate."

"What's up?" asked Bartley, a little impatient at the interruption of his favourite pastime.

The district attorney jerked his head in the direction of the caddy, who was obviously listening.

"I see," said Bartley, handing his stick to the lad and turning in the direction of the club house. "This is my assistant, Mr. Pelt," he now said to the attorney, introducing me; "do you want him to come along?"

"I presume so," replied Mr. Sullivan, "if he is to assist you in the case."

"And what is the case?" asked Bartley as we walked towards the club house.

"There is trouble at the Underwoods, an affair that seems to need the service of a man of your ability."

"John Underwood, the great bear of Wall Street,"

remarked Bartley to me, "that's the mansion with the high sea wall we passed this morning when we came up the beach. Jewel robbery, I suppose ; they have been pretty thick around here of late."

"More serious than that," said Sullivan ; "this is really a most important case."

"And, whatever it is, am I to understand that Underwood himself has called me into the matter ? "

"I was sending for you because Mrs. Underwood asked me to secure the best detective I could get hold of—John Underwood himself is dead ! "

"How ? "

"Suicide, apparently ; he shot himself last night in the library. The room was locked, both doors and windows, from the inside. There is really no other possible explanation, but Underwood carried three hundred thousand of insurance, with a clause in the policy which makes it void in case of suicide, and that is why you are wanted in the matter."

By this time we had reached the porch of the club house and found chairs in a secluded corner.

"Has the news been given out yet ? " asked Bartley as he eyed Sullivan closely.

"No, they're keeping it quiet as long as they can ; one reason, I presume, is to protect Underwood's interest in the stock market."

"Well, give us the details," Bartley broke in.

"It seems this morning," began the attorney, "that Underwood did not turn up at breakfast. He always breakfasts at eight o'clock. They waited a half-hour, and then his secretary, Vance, went to his rooms and knocked at the door. Getting no reply, he tried the door, and finding it unbolted, entered. The room was empty, and the bed had not been slept in. Mrs. Underwood's maid reported that he was not in his wife's rooms, so Vance went to the library, the place where Underwood spent his evenings, and trying the door, found that locked. He became alarmed then, and he called the butler. They went out to the front of the house, and getting a ladder placed it at the library windows. Vance

climbed up, and looking in saw Underwood seated at his desk. By that time he was sure something was wrong, and he went back to the house and called Mrs. Underwood."

"Did they try the windows?" asked Bartley.

"Yes, but they were locked."

"In other words," said Bartley, "both the door and windows were locked?"

"That's it. When I looked the room over, the windows were still locked. They called Mrs. Underwood, and when she came down she ordered them to break down the door. It's a rather massive thing, and so they knocked a hole in it, and reaching in, unlocked it. The key was in the door, on the inside. They found Mr. Underwood dead. He was in a chair by his desk, shot through the brain.

"They first sent for a doctor, who came promptly and announced that Underwood had been dead some hours. The doctor did not disturb the body. They left everything as it was and sent for the chief of the police, and shortly afterwards for me.

"The coroner was out of town for the day, and the chief and I, after looking things over, decided to wait until this evening, when the coroner would return. I was away during part of the day, but Jenkins, one of our local patrolmen, a very reliable fellow, was left to guard the place. I went back about an hour ago, as I wanted to be there when the coroner came. It was only then that Mrs. Underwood spoke to me of the insurance, with the result that I hurried to the telegraph office, and from there here. It is exceedingly fortunate that you happened to be in the locality."

Bartley had risen to his feet, a little smile playing around his lips. "In other words, you are not just certain that Underwood killed himself?"

Sullivan was silent a moment. "Well, they said it was suicide, and it looks like it, and yet I can't for the life of me see why a man like Underwood should kill himself. He had more money than a dozen men could use; there were no family troubles; he has only been

married a year to his young wife. But the strangest thing to me is this: If he shot himself, the revolver should have been in the room, on the desk, in his hand, or on the floor. Well, I have searched the room a dozen times, and not a trace of that revolver can I find."

He sank back into his chair, and watched Bartley intently. It was some moments before the latter spoke, and then he said slowly:

"That's strange. Do you think any one moved it when they went in the room—the family or the servants?"

"No," was the reply. "I questioned them all, and every one was sure that they had not seen a revolver. Of course it looks like suicide, but——"

Bartley continued the sentence: "—But then again it doesn't. I think we had better look at things. It seems to be an interesting case."

Sullivan looked relieved. "All right, my car is here."

CHAPTER II

THE DEAD MAN SITTING THERE

LEANING back in the car, I thought of the story I had just heard. I had not been with Bartley so long, but that I felt a thrill of excitement with every new case that came to us. Without a doubt there were some novel features in the story that the district attorney had just told us. So for a while I puzzled over them, but could reach no conclusion.

"Who is at the house now?" Bartley asked.

"Just the family," replied Sullivan, "and the servants. Mrs. Underwood was away yesterday, but got back some time last night."

"Let me see," said Bartley. "If I remember, she is Underwood's second wife. His first wife died some years ago. His present wife he married a year or so ago, and she was an actress playing on Broadway. I remember the marriage made some little stir, because she was a good many years younger than Underwood."

"That's right," answered Sullivan. "Moreover, she is one of the most beautiful women that I have ever seen. She is only twenty-two; a bit older than his son. But the impression here is that it was a very happy marriage. Speaking of the son, his name is Robert. He was expelled from Yale, was a bit wild, but the only thing I can find that he did was to be mixed up in some automobile scrape, nothing very bad. So I judge his wildness is more talk than anything else."

At this point the car swung up the long drive leading to the house. We alighted upon the great stone platform, that formed the top of the sea wall, which dropped forty feet to the beach below.

"That's the room where they found Underwood," said Sullivan, pointing to three large windows which faced the sea.

Climbing the great stone steps, we pushed the button, and waited before the heavy door. It was opened by the butler, an old man with a rather intelligent face, his grey hairs showing years of service. He was listless and tired, walking with a weary step, and it was easy to see that he had received a great shock. He bowed us into a huge hall, and speaking in a tired voice, said :

"Mr. Sullivan, Mr. Vance wished me to say that the coroner came a while ago ; he is in the room now with the chief of police. The coroner wished me to notify him when you came, and if you will step into the music-room, I will tell him you are here."

We entered the room he pointed out, and waited his return. It seemed only a moment before he was back, bringing with him two men. One, wearing a blue uniform, I judged was the head of the local police force. The other was a little fat man, who was in great need of a shave. His collar, which was several days old, had crumbled, while his baggy brown suit might have been cleaner. In fact, he looked the part of the broken down politician. It was easy to see that he was a little excited, but that did not cause him to forget the importance of his position. He bowed to Sullivan, gave Bartley and me a glance as if to ask who we were. When Sullivan introduced us he said in a rather formal tone, "I am very glad to have the honour of meeting you, Mr. Bartley. But I will not take much of your time. The case is very simple."

Bartley spoke softly, "So you have decided on your finding ?"

The coroner glanced at him with an air of surprise, as if he was startled. "Why it's a plain case of suicide. Room all locked up, and no one able to get in or out, and then the note on the table."

Both Sullivan and Bartley broke in on him :

"What note ?"

"Not a complete note. But under some papers I found a note written to some lawyer ; it was on the desk. Just a line ; it was unsigned, but the secretary tells me it was in Mr. Underwood's handwriting. It

was, ‘After thinking it all over I have decided to end it, that will bring h——’ There was nothing more. But I think without a doubt that it proves suicide all right, and the chief agrees with me.”

And to this the man in blue solemnly nodded his assent.

For a moment Bartley looked at the men: there was an air of perplexity on his face. After a silence he said, “We had better have a look at the room.”

We filed out of the room into the hall. It stretched half across the house, till it met the large stairway leading to the other floor. Upon one side was the high parlour and the music room that we had just left. An open door enabled me to see a great dining-room, its contents veiled by the growing dusk. On the other side, the side facing the sea, were several other rooms, but they were not open, and I could not tell what they were. And near the stairs, the light streaming through the broken panel of a door, was the library.

Sullivan knocked softly, and the door was opened by a young patrolman.

In this room the lights were on and even under their glare the room appeared to be immense. Around its walls on nearly every side the bookcases towered to the ceiling, their shelves burdened with books. Upon the walls were a number of oil paintings, mostly marine views, evidently part of Underwood’s wonderful collection. In the centre of the room was the largest desk that I have ever seen, heavy and massive—its surface, save for a few papers, clean. By the great fireplace at the end of the room was seen a built-in safe, and near it several tall, green, steel filing cases. The entire setting marked the room as the place where a man of wealth would retire when he wished to be alone with his books. But my eyes did not linger long on these things, for, try as I could, they kept coming back to the one thing, whose presence filled the room. That still figure by the huge desk, the dead man sitting silent in his chair.

We walked to the front of the desk and stood looking down at him. The figure of the dead man was clad in a grey suit. He was leaning back in his chair, as if he

wished to rest himself for a moment. The left hand was grasping the arm of the chair, while the other hand rested upon his knee. The head had fallen upon his right shoulder. Though his face was grey in death, yet it was calm, but I noticed that his open eyes had a startled look in them. But for the small hole in the forehead, flecked by a tiny drop of blood, one would not know that he had died a violent death.

For a while we stood looking at him, each busy with his thoughts. Bartley at last turned to Sullivan.

"Can you get me the private secretary Vance?"

Going to the door, Sullivan spoke to Jenkins, the young patrolman, who had been on duty guarding the room.

Bartley walked around the desk, and, lifting Underwood's right hand, glanced at it a moment, then looked at the other. For a moment he studied the chair that was pushed a little back from the desk, near where I was standing. He then went to the three windows, in the centre of the room, which were hidden by long curtains. These windows were tall, all about the same size, though maybe the one in the centre was the largest. The top and bottom sash were each fitted with a single pane of glass. Bartley tried to lift them, trying one after another, but they were locked, the catches being the ordinary kind. For a moment he stood looking at the windows, a little frown upon his face. Through the glass one could look down upon the sea, the surface glimmering faintly in the fast-fading twilight. Then leaving the windows, he went around the room, stopping once in a while before some object, then passing on to something else.

There came a little knock at the door, and turning, we saw Jenkins had returned. With him was a young man, about twenty-four, whom I took to be Vance. His every air marked him as a student. He had an intelligent face surmounted by a mass of brown hair, and he wore the largest pair of tortoiseshell glasses that I have ever seen. Though his eyes wore a little excited look, otherwise he seemed to be calm.

"I take it you are the private secretary," said Bartley.

Vance nodded his head.

"Now, Mr. Vance, is everything in this room just as you found it when you broke in and found Mr. Underwood dead? I mean, I want to know if a thing has been changed, even the merest trifle."

The secretary replied at once. "Nothing was touched in the room, sir. We left it just as we found it, and sent for the chief of police. When he came, he left the officer who has since been in charge."

Bartley turned to the coroner. "If you don't mind I will take another glance around the room."

He worked quickly, his tall figure moving from one object to the other. But I, who knew him, understood that not a single feature was escaping his notice. He glanced at the bookcases, the books standing in orderly rows on the shelves, pausing a moment before the closed door of the built-in safe. Going to the door, he took the key which was still in the lock and examined it very carefully, also the lock, both in the room and on the side in the hall. Coming back into the room, he went again to the windows, where he again tried the locks and spent some little time before he returned to the desk.

Then he came back to the centre of the room, and silently studied the dead man. Going to the desk, he commenced to look over the few things on it, for its great surface was almost clean. In the centre stood a gold inkstand, shaped like a lion's head, and near it several pens. At one end, near the figure of the dead man, was a pile of correspondence, evidently the daily post. In the centre were several typewritten sheets of paper, a leaf with some figures on it and a pad of telegraph blanks. The *Wall Street Journal* of the day before, its pages open at the stock quotations, lay near the sheets of paper. In almost the centre of the desk, near the inkwell, stood an ash tray, and near it, but on the other side of the desk, was a squat black cigar.

Taking things as they stood, I decided that little of interest had been found. But Bartley worked on,

glancing through the letters, looking over the typewritten sheets, and at last going through the drawers of the desk, which he had opened. When he came to the ash tray, he spent more time, lifting it carefully, while he peered at the contents. Apparently satisfied, he went back to the side of Underwood, and, bending to the floor, came up with a cigar in his hand. He had not spoken, but turning to the coroner he now said, "You have the note you found ? "

The latter plunged his hand into his pocket, and produced a battered and faded bill case, out of which he took a piece of paper which he handed to Bartley. Spreading it on the desk, we crowded around to see. It was a single piece of paper, part of the general business stock, for at the top was engraved "John Underwood." It was undated, and contained only these words : "After thinking it all over, I have decided to end it. That will bring h—." The last word was unfinished, only the letter h, started and uncompleted. Bartley looked up at me, and silently placed his finger upon the address that was over the note,

M. S. PHELPS,
180 Broadway, New York.

" You know who it is ? "

I nodded, for the initials were those of Underwood's lawyer, well known as one of the leaders of the New York bar.

He turned to the coroner.

" Where did you find it ? "

" Under the pile of letters," was the answer. " It was near the end of the pile, and folded up."

No one made any answer, but while I was wondering what the letter could mean, Bartley asked,

" Mr. Vance, how about that chair ? Does it always stand there ? "

He pointed to the chair, which stood on the other side of the desk from Underwood. It stood, squarely facing the desk, but about three feet away from it.

Vance looked at it, puzzled. " No——" he hesitated. " As a rule there is nothing there."

Back came the next question. "Did you sit in it last night? I take it, of course, that you did some work here last evening."

"Yes," came the reply, "I always have to open the evening post about seven. But if I sit here it is always by Mr. Underwood's side. I don't think I used that chair, nor do I remember seeing a chair there last night. In fact, I am sure there was none, for I stood there a moment before I left the room."

"And what time was that?"

"About eight. I answered some letters, then went to my room. As a rule I work much later than that, but last evening Mr. Underwood dismissed me rather early. So I said good-night and left him. He generally spent the evening reading, when the letters had been dictated."

"I see," said Bartley, "and I take it he smoked."

"Oh, yes."

"Cigarettes?"

"Never," was Vance's reply. "In fact, he had a rather intense dislike to them."

Bartley picked up the cigar from the desk. "Is this one of his cigars?"

Vance took the cigar, studying it for a moment. "Yes, that is one of his. I know because he always smoked the same kind. They were made for his special order, and he would smoke no other kind."

"Do you ever smoke in his room?"

"Never," said Vance.

Placing the cigar back on the desk, Bartley again turned to the secretary. "By the way, you went through his clothes. Did you find anything missing, either from his clothes or the room?"

"No," was the answer. "Everything is as you see it; even his money was untouched."

Bartley took a turn round the table, and paused as if in thought, then he said, "Well, that's all I wish to know now."

The coroner looked at him, as if wishing he would tell what he had discovered. But Bartley's face gave

no sign that he knew they were waiting for him to speak. After a while the coroner said,

"It's time the chief and I returned to town. The doctor will have his autopsy this evening, and I will hold the hearing to-morrow at nine. You can move the body, and I presume you will leave the room undisturbed."

"Do you care to give any hint of what your finding will be?" I asked.

He looked about in an important way, and taking a soiled handkerchief from his pocket slowly polished his glasses.

"Of course I cannot say what my jury may decide at the hearing, but I can give you my own opinion. It's suicide, everything here points that way. Here's the man dead in a locked room, nothing disturbed, money not taken, and then a note that says he was going to end it."

I glanced at Bartley; there was a little smile playing over his lips, as if he was amused at something.

"I am afraid," he said, "that you cannot build too much on that note. First of all, we are not sure that it was written last night, the ink was not very fresh on it, and then it's undated. Then one cannot conceive that a man about to kill himself would write a note to that effect and leave it unfinished, and then tuck it away out of sight. In all suicide cases that I have seen, where the man wrote a note, he left it in plain sight."

This seemed to disturb the coroner, for he sneered.

"Then, maybe, you don't agree with me?"

The reply came quick as a flash. "I don't, not for a moment. It's murder, everything in this room points to that."

CHAPTER III

CLUES THAT ARE ASHES

THE word "murder" rang through the still room with an ominous sound that affected us all.

The coroner was startled into a sudden exclamation, his face a study of wonder and chagrin. The district attorney showed less astonishment, while I myself had been with Bartley too long to be startled at any conclusion that he might reach. He studied us for a moment, and seeing that we were waiting for him to speak, began.

"You will find in every criminal case there are always a number of facts, that, taken as a whole, seem to lead to a definite conclusion. If we take each fact by itself, it may lead us, however, in another way. Now take this case. There are several things that seem to point direct to suicide. The closed room with the door and the windows locked, and the discovery of the so-called note—all these seem to point to one thing, suicide. But there are also a number of other things, that, though they may be small in themselves, yet when you add them all up point very clearly to murder."

The coroner broke in on him. "Will you kindly tell us what they are?"

Bartley continued. "We find in this case a man killed, and every exit from the room locked on the inside. But he is shot through the forehead, death presumably was instantaneous, and yet we find no revolver. Again, on the desk, we find a copy of the *Wall Street Journal*. I think we can assume that Underwood had been reading it, as we find on a piece of paper his notes and calculations concerning the prices of several stocks. Hastily considered, this might seem evidence of suicide if his figures referred to sudden heavy losses in the market. But on going over them carefully I find that they relate, not to past losses, but to future

operations. Now a man who is thinking of killing himself is not apt to spend the few moments before he does it in planning future business deals. And while murder is often the result of sudden impulse, suicide never is."

He picked up the ash tray that was on the desk and went on. "I find this to be rather suggestive. Here are the stumps of two cigars, and what is left of a cigarette. One cigar is like the cigar that was found on the desk, the same heavy black Havana tobacco, his own make, in fact. The other is not. I have made some little study of tobacco, and it is a rather easy thing to distinguish the various grades and brands. The other cigar was another brand, a cheaper one, of the kind that sells in most places for ten cents. Now what do we make of this? Simply that Mr. Underwood was smoking when the murderer entered the room. He offered him a cigar, for I have the idea that he knew the man, but he did not take it, smoking instead one of his own. Then later, just before he was killed, Underwood lighted a fresh cigar."

The coroner broke in with an exclamation of astonishment.

Bartley smiled. "It seems plain that whoever was in the room must have been some one that Underwood knew, or some one whom he was expecting. He dismissed Vance early. That may have meant that he did not wish to be disturbed because he had some one coming to see him. Maybe he did not know him, but I think that he did, for the interview lasted long enough for a cigar to be smoked. It would take from thirty minutes at the longest to maybe twenty at the shortest for the cigar to be smoked. The cigar Underwood offered was refused. You see its position on the table, pushed over from Underwood, for it was just opposite his chair. It was refused, for the man did not pick it up but let it stay on the desk. Yet he sat in that chair, and he smoked. On the floor where the chair must have stood are cigar ashes. Now, you saw me pick up a partly smoked cigar from the floor near Underwood's chair. Only a little of it has been smoked, and

the carpet is burned where it fell ; it was lighted while the murderer was in the room, sometime after the other man had lighted his cigar. I think the murderer rose to his feet and suddenly fired. It must have been sudden and also unexpected, for Underwood had no time to move ; you can tell that from his position in the chair. The man was standing, for the bullet took a downward course. There were no traces of powder marks, which would have been found had it been suicide. So I think we can picture the murder taking place in this way. The men had been talking, when the murderer, five or six feet away, rose suddenly to his feet and fired. As the bullet hit him, Underwood's cigar fell to the floor by the side of his chair. The man later walked around the desk, for I find the cigar that was on the floor had been crushed by some one's feet. I take it he would want to make sure he was dead. Then shortly afterwards he left the room, but how I cannot tell."

We had all been paying the closest attention, and I saw Sullivan nod his head in approval. To me it was so clear and realistic, that instinctively I gave a little shudder. It seemed that I could almost see the murderer rising to his feet, and the sudden shot. Bartley, as a rule, was not given to airing his opinions, but he continued.

"Just how the cigarette is to be explained I cannot say. Maybe there were two people in the room, but that will have to be decided later. All I wish to say is that there is no doubt but that he was murdered."

The coroner, who had listened very carefully, said, "I think you are right ; it sounds reasonable. But what do you think was the motive ? "

Bartley smiled. "I have no idea. All I can say at this moment is that it hardly looks like robbery."

The coroner and the police captain withdrew, and having retired some little distance away held a conversation in low voice. But in the space of a moment the coroner returned to our side.

"I will hold the inquest to-morrow morning at nine. Who is in charge here ? "

It was Vance who answered. "I am, that is for the present, till the young man returns. Mrs. Underwood is confined to her room by the shock, and asked me to take charge of things till Mr. Underwood's lawyer arrives."

"Well," said the coroner, "you can move the body if you wish. I will have to leave now."

He shook hands with us all, murmured a few commonplace remarks, and the coroner, with his police chief, left us.

Sullivan waited until he was out of the room, and then turned to Bartley with a broad smile. "It's a little over his head, Mr. Bartley, but I think you can handle it. I presume you can arrange to stay in the house. As for me, I would like to get back home, as my wife is alone."

Vance, who had left the room with the coroner, returned and said to Bartley: "Mr. Bartley, Mrs. Underwood wished me to take charge of things. She has no knowledge of business at all, for Mr. Underwood took charge of everything. Just at present she is prostrated by his death. Mr. Sullivan has, I presume, told you about the insurance, which, of course, means that the affair must be looked into thoroughly. Any fee that you think is proper will be paid gladly by the estate."

Bartley did not reply at first, but by the eager look in his eyes I could tell that he was interested. And so I was not surprised when he answered, "I will be very pleased to do what I can."

Vance looked relieved. "I am very glad. And, if you will pardon a thought of mine, it might be well if your assistant and yourself took up your quarters in the house for a few days."

Bartley nodded his approval. "It was what I would have asked. I wish to make a careful investigation, and it is best that I should be here, at least for a short time."

Sullivan, who had been looking anxiously at his watch, now bade us good-night. Vance went down to the hall with him but returned in a moment. Bartley walked over to the fireplace and put a log on the smouldering

embers, and then motioned Vance and me to the seat that flanked it. Silently we watched the little tongues of fire licking the log. At last Bartley turned to Vance.

"Vance, I have an idea that you did not just agree with me when I said there was nothing missing from the room. I mean that you think or know of something that should be here."

The secretary looked rather startled, and from the expression on his face I doubted if he cared very much to answer. But he said: "You are right, sir. I told the truth when I said there was nothing missing—I mean from Mr. Underwood's person, watch, purse, jewellery, and such things. No one seemed to have bothered about them. But there was something missing, something that the coroner and you would not be expected to know about."

Vance paused, and again I thought he seemed a little unwilling to speak. But after a while he continued: "It's like this, Mr. Bartley. I did not care to speak about it to the coroner, for after all I am not sure that it has any bearing on the death of Mr. Underwood. Then again, I know that until this affair is over all of us who are in the house are, in a way, under suspicion. And then Mr. Underwood and myself were the only ones that knew anything about it. Yesterday about three o'clock he sent for me and said that I was to go to town and cash a cheque for him. I answered that the bank would be closed. But he said that he had called up the cashier of the First National, and that he would be waiting for me. So I took the cheque and received the money. It was made out to bearer, and was for three thousand dollars. It was in three packages of one thousand dollars each, all in fifty dollar bills. When I returned I gave the money to him, and he said that he wanted to use it the next morning."

Bartley broke in on him: "If he intended to use that money the next day, then he did not intend to kill himself. The suicide theory has this other fact against it. Did you see what he did with the money when you gave it to him?"

"Yes," Vance answered. "He placed it on his desk,—by the inkstand. It was there when I left the room. This morning I noticed the money was gone, but I have not discovered where it went."

"I see," said Bartley. "Now I understand, you left him about eight o'clock. Did you see him again that night?"

"No, I did not see him, but I know he was in the library about ten."

"How do you know?"

"I went to my room about eight," Vance replied, "and read a little and then wrote several letters. I went down in the hall to place them on the stand, so the butler would see that they got in the morning's mail. As I passed the library door, I heard Mr. Underwood speaking."

Bartley broke in on him. "He was speaking rather loudly?"

Vance looked rather startled, so Bartley added: "If you heard him in the hall with the door closed he must have been speaking in a loud voice. That's a rather massive door, and I doubt if you could hear an ordinary conversation in the hall when it is closed."

"Yes," answered Vance, "his voice was raised rather high. I placed the letters on the stand, and when the door was passed on my way upstairs they were still quarrelling."

Bartley interrupted, "You say, 'They were still quarrelling.' You knew then who the other person in the room was?"

Vance was not very keen to answer, and when he did it was in a very low voice: "It was his son Robert."

The eager look came into Bartley's eyes. "But I thought he was away?"

"He went away last night; I don't know what time. In fact, I have not seen him myself for several weeks, for he has not been home. I don't know how or when he came in last night."

"Do you know what they were quarrelling about?" asked Bartley.

"No, I do not. There has been some little feeling on the part of Mr. Underwood towards his son, and he had forbidden him to stay around the house. The boy had done some rather high playing at Clark's, and when his father heard of it he was angry. I myself heard him say that unless the boy stopped gambling he would turn him out of the house. So the boy had not been home for some time, and I was rather startled to hear his voice. But I could not hear what was said."

Bartley walked to the desk and slowly paced back again to our side. There was a thoughtful look on his face.

"Do you know where the boy is now?"

"No. I understood he was going on a yachting trip but with whom I do not know, nor where."

Bartley said nothing for a moment, then asked, "By the way, you never saw any sign of a revolver when you broke into the room?"

Vance shook his head, "No, we looked for it, but could not find it anywhere."

"Did you have one in the house?"

"I cannot say. I never heard of Mr. Underwood having a gun of any kind. I think there is one out in the garage, but it's a shotgun. And then I remember that Mr. Underwood's son had a revolver once, but he gave it away."

Bartley turned to the desk. "I think that is all for the present, Vance. You will want to arrange for the undertaker to look after the body." He turned to me. "And you better go to the hotel and get our things."

"I will have the car for you in a moment," said Vance as he left the room.

The moment he was out of sight, Bartley turned.

"Now, Pelt, you hustle up to Clark's and find out if the young man was in there last night, and if he played. Better see Clark himself and find out all you can about the young fellow."

I nodded my assent, and hearing the machine upon the drive I turned to leave the room. The last glance that I had as I went out was of Bartley, busy at the desk among the mass of papers.

CHAPTER IV

A POOR PLACE TO HIDE A GUN

I FOUND the car, a red French racing machine, waiting on the driveway. Giving my directions to the driver, a young Irishman, I told him to first drop me at Clark's, and then to go to the hotel for our things.

Almost before I realized it we stopped in front of Clark's. In a way it was one of the show places of the Point. Standing upon a little hill was the great stone and wood cottage.

Just how Clark managed to fix it up with the authorities no one ever found out, but at any rate the place was never raided. It may have been because of the class of people that it catered for—the wealthiest people of Newport and New York.

I walked up the pebbled walk to the great massive door, silent and dark before me. After a moment I found the bell. The house itself was dark, though one could catch a line of light at the windows. Suddenly the door before me opened. I turned, peering at me through the opening was a servant. He studied me a moment before he decided to let me in, but I had been there before and he recognized me. Giving my hat to him, I climbed the four steps that led to the house, standing a moment at the top to glance over the great room. In the very centre of the room, under the great dome, was a double roulette table of mahogany and silver. In other parts of the room were other roulette wheels, also tables for faro, and *rouge et noire*. There were people gathered around the last, but the roulette tables seemed to be the most popular, for nearly all of the seventy or more men in the room were gathered there. There was little conversation, the only sound being the ball as it dropped from the wheel, and the

voices of the dealers calling the numbers. Over the room hung a faint haze of tobacco.

I stood studying the men who were playing for a moment. I had a good description of young Underwood, and I felt sure that if he was in the room I would recognize him. But I found no one like him. Many of the men playing I had seen either at the hotel or at the golf club.

Catching the eye of one of the attendants I beckoned to him. He came across the room, and I asked him if Mr. Clark was in, and if I might speak to him. He hesitated a moment and seemed rather doubtful, but said he would see what he could do. In a few minutes the attendant had returned with Clark.

At first glance one would have taken Clark, with his portly figure, for a business man, though the checks of his grey suit were rather large, and the diamond in his red tie a little conspicuous. His round face was smooth, though a little white. As I stepped up to him, he studied me carefully with his keen grey eyes before he spoke.

"You wished to see me?" he asked.

For an answer I gave him one of Bartley's business cards. Though he must have been surprised, he showed no signs of it.

"You are not Mr. Bartley?" he asked.

"No," was my reply, "I am his assistant."

He studied me for a moment, turning the card over and over in his hand, then said, "I think we could talk better in my office."

I followed him to the end of the room, where we went up a short pair of stairs to a small room, in the front of the house.

He waved me to a chair with his hand, and finding a box of cigars, pushed them across the desk to me. Slowly lighting his cigar he waited for me to speak.

"Mr. Bartley wished me to ask that you give him a little information," I said.

The big frame of the gambler moved a little in his chair, and into his eyes, which had never left my face, there came a slight look of interest. "I would feel it

a privilege to be able to aid Mr. Bartley in any way I could," he answered.

I went direct to my question. "He would like to know if Robert Underwood has been in your place to-day."

He looked rather startled for a moment, but at once replied, "I don't remember seeing him myself. But my manager can tell you far better than I can. He knows every one that comes into the place."

He rose, leaned over the desk and pushed a button in the wall. In a moment a young man in an evening suit, after knocking, entered. Clark said to him, "This gentleman would like to know if you have seen Mr. Underwood here to-day?"

"No," was the reply. "I have not seen him, and do not think that he has been here to-day."

I put the more important question. "Was he here yesterday, at any time!"

"Yes. He was in here last night. I think it was about twelve o'clock. He played a few turns of the wheel."

"Have you any idea the amount he played?"

The young man gave a quick glance at Clark, who nodded back at him. "I cannot say as to that, sir, but it may be the dealer at whose table he played may know."

"Put some one else at the wheel and send him in," said Clark.

After the manager left he turned to me. "You will pardon me, but is there anything in this that will hurt the house? I run a quiet place and any scandal would drive away my clients."

I hesitated a moment. Though I knew that the murder would be out no doubt in the morning papers, yet I did not feel free to give Clark the facts, so I answered by saying, "I don't think that there is anything in it that will harm your place."

At that moment there came a knock at the door, and the dealer entered. He stood silent, his face expressionless, though he darted a quick glance at me when he entered the room.

"This gentleman," said Clark, "wishes you to answer a few questions."

He turned his gaze to me, and waited till I asked, "Can you tell me if Robert Underwood played at your table yesterday?"

"Yes, sir. He was in during the afternoon, but did not play. I did not see him again till round eleven that night."

"Are you sure of the time?" I asked.

"I am. I get relieved at eleven thirty. And he played a few turns, staying at the table for about a half-hour; then said he would have to leave as he was going on a yachting trip, and that they started about twelve. It was twenty minutes to twelve then, for my relief had been waiting for about ten minutes for me to leave the table."

"How did he act when you first saw him?"

"Well," said the dealer, "he was a little bit excited, though I don't know what over. I was surprised to see him come to my table and play, for though he played a bit the first of the season, he had done little the past few weeks. He told me that his father had refused to let him have any more money. But last night he walked over to the table, and threw down a fifty dollar bill."

"What?" I interrupted.

"A fifty dollar bill, on the colour. I was surprised to see it. But he had more, for when he lost that one he put down another. In fact, he had quite a package of bills."

Here seemed a rather startling coincidence. Vance had told us that the young man quarrelled with his father and that the quarrel was over the fact that he had been gambling. Then I remembered the story of the money, in fifty dollar bills, that Vance claimed Underwood had the night before, and also that the money was missing. And the fact that a few moments after the murder the young man had come into the gambling house, and started to play with fifty dollar bills, seemed striking. For it was bills of that denomination which were in the missing package. Then Underwood

had refused to give his son any money, until he had promised to stop gambling.

"Are you sure regarding the money that he played?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, dead sure. Fifty dollars is large enough to remember. For as a rule they don't play as high as that on one turn of the wheel. I mean by that, when a man plays a high amount he will buy chips and not play the money itself."

"Now about that package of bills?" I asked.

"I don't know if they were all of the same amount. But I remember that when he wanted more money he took a flat package of bills from his inside pocket, and took what he wanted from it. I don't know if all the bills in that package were fifties, but all he played were."

"You say that Underwood seemed to be a little excited. In what way?" I ventured.

"Yes, he was a little. You see, sir, we watch the players rather carefully, and I got the idea that he was worked up a little over something. He seemed to be in a hurry also."

There followed a pause, and at length I said, "I think that will be all."

He glanced at Clark, who dismissed him with a wave of his hand. But as he stood by the door, I thought of another question.

"Have you any idea where he was going?"

He turned. "I heard him say something about Block Island, but I am not sure that was the place he was going to."

He waited a moment, then seeing I had nothing more to ask him, left us.

I had secured all that I could, in fact more than I had expected, and I was anxious to get back to Bartley and see what he would have to say about it. So rising, I thanked Clark, and we left the room. He went with me to the door, the first a massive thing of steel, and then to the outer door, leaving me on the steps.

The car was waiting for me, and in a few moments I was again at the house. The old butler, who seemed

even more tired and worn, said in a weary voice, "If you please, sir, Mr. Bartley wished me to say that he is in your rooms, and that he wished to see you as soon as you had returned. If you will follow me I will take you to him."

I followed him down the length of the great hall, past the closed door of the room where the crime had been committed. Then we went up a flight of stairs, and knocked at a door on the left of the landing. Bartley's voice answered, and I entered. He was seated in front of a large fireplace, in a great armchair. There was a book in his hand. By his side was a table covered with a mass of letters and papers and several books, with richly tooled leather covers. He smiled up at me and placed the book he was reading on the table. I picked it up and glanced at it. It was a thin copy of Petronius. The quaint French letters on the parchment were faded with age. Noticing that I was looking at it he said,

"I discovered it down in the library. There are a number of other good things down there besides this, though this is a very rare edition of Petronius. Ever read it?"

I shook my head.

"Well, he gives us a rather highly coloured picture of Roman life, yet I dare say you can find its counterpart in the society life of our day. The world has not changed as much as we sometimes think, or at least the people in it have not changed." He paused a moment. "Find anything?"

He was silent, setting back in his chair, with his eyes on my face, while I told him what I had discovered. The smoke from his cigar curled slowly to the ceiling in a grey mist. He did not speak till I finished and then simply said, "In the main, it's about what I expected."

"It looks rather bad for the young man," I replied.

He smiled. "There you go again, jumping at conclusions. The facts you have told me mean very little in themselves. Taken in connection with the murder they may assume more importance, and are worthy of being looked into. But there is nothing very sinister or

out of the ordinary in a man who frequents Clark's being seen there last night."

I enlightened him. "How about the fact he had no money in the afternoon, and came back to play at the time after Underwood was shot. And played with fifty dollar bills. You know Vance said that money was missing from the room, and that it was in fifty dollar bills. It looks rather convincing to me."

"Yes," he replied, "*it looks so.*" He rose to his feet, and going to the other side of the desk opened a drawer. Fumbling in it for a moment, he threw the thing that he was after out on the table. It was a black squat automatic revolver, shining with newness.

"I think without a doubt," said Bartley, "that the shot that killed Underwood was fired from a revolver like this, and perhaps from this very one."

I said nothing for a moment, then asked, "Where did you find it?"

"I found it in a room I searched while you were gone," he answered.

"Whose?" I asked.

He went back to the chair, seated himself, took another cigar, lighted it, then glancing at me said shortly, "Robert Underwood's."

CHAPTER V

A FIGHT IN THE DEATH CHAMBER

I STOOD for a moment looking at Bartley in astonishment. If what he had said was true, then it seemed to me that the last link in the chain of evidence against the young man had been reached. I could not see how he would be able to explain away the damaging evidence that was against him. There was the lost money, and the fact that he had played with money at Clark's which was of the same amount, and now came the finding of the gun in his room. To me it seemed almost a complete case.

Bartley evidently saw that I was rather startled, for he added : " Jenkins and I went through the house after you left. We questioned the servants, but evidently they failed to hear anything last night. There was a heavy surf pounding on the shore. Then we went through their rooms, but found nothing till we came to the room that belonged to Underwood's son. It was the typical room of a college youth. Pennants of all kinds were over the walls, and countless pictures, mostly of girls that he knew or pictures of the popular actresses. He had a fine collection of the last. There were a few books, and they were mostly trash. The few letters that I found were chiefly bills. There seems to be no doubt that he was broke, but at that his bills were not large. But under the bed I found this gun."

" Are you sure this is the gun with which Underwood was shot ? " I asked.

Bartley was silent a moment then replied : " That's a hard thing to be sure of. There is no doubt that this gun was fired a few hours ago. Five bullets are still in it, and you can find the traces of powder on the barrel. Even yet the barrel is a little oily. It's a new gun, too, and whoever owned it has not had it very long. I will be

able to tell when it was made, and maybe trace it by the number on it."

I could think of nothing to say but that it looked bad for the young man. To this Bartley agreed but added : "At that it looks rather strange that the gun should have been found under the bed. Whoever shot Underwood would, you might think, wish to get rid of the gun, and to hide it, or throw it away. But under a bed is a very clumsy place to hide it. Now if it was Robert, the son, who did the killing, then he must have killed his father, and gone up to his room, where he threw the gun under the bed. Then he went to Clark's. Now I hardly see just where he had time to do all this, if he was in Clark's at the time they say he was. We are at least sure he was there shortly after eleven, and I feel sure that Underwood was not shot much before that hour. Then again, why throw the gun under the bed ? You might say he expected to return and then hide it. But we are told that he was in a hurry, that he was going on a yachting cruise, and if that was so then he knew he would not be back to hide the gun, and it was sure to be found where it was. Then if he wished to get rid of the gun, why did he not take it with him, bury it in the sand, or else throw it in the sea. That would have been the easy thing to do, and it never would have been found then. In fact, I think——"

"What ?" I asked eagerly.

He rose to his feet, and going to the fireplace dropped his cigar in the hot ashes. Turning he stood leaning against the mantel.

"Nothing," was his answer. "The case is far too complex for me to wander off on any theories. So far I have little to base them on. And there is no place for theories in this case, as yet."

"It's a strange affair," I added.

"I have an idea it will turn out to be one of the strangest cases we have ever had. But let us look over the facts that we have and see what we make of them."

He fumbled in the pocket of his blue-velvet smoking jacket, and brought forth a well-worn briar pipe. Drop-

ping back in his chair, he packed the bowl of his pipe, patting the tobacco into place. When the pipe was drawing to suit him, he started :

" In nearly every case that we have been on before, there has always been something that gave one some sort of a clue even at the very first ; some fact that would give one a little light into the inner secrets of the case. But so far in this affair there seems to be very little. You would expect to find some fact of importance in the room where the man was shot. But there was very little there that would aid us." He was silent a moment, a thoughtful look coming into his face.

" Do you think," I ventured, " that maybe he killed himself after all ? "

He shook his head. " No, he could not have killed himself. There are many reasons for my saying that. One of them is the fact that, above all other things, there was no reason why he should. A man like he, with his wealth, his many interests in life, is not going to commit suicide. Then you can tell by the lack of powder marks on his face. If he killed himself the powder marks would be there, and they were not. And if he killed himself, what became of the gun ? There is no doubt to me that he was murdered."

I broke in on him with, " I can't see how the murderer left the room."

Bartley replied : " The question of the locked room is one that, if we could answer it, would in my opinion come very near solving the whole case. There is no doubt that the door leading from the hall into the library was locked, and on the inside. There are several who can swear to that."

" That is, if they tell the truth," I added.

Bartley nodded assent to this. " Yes, we have to suppose they are telling the truth. But then again you don't expect that all the people that saw that door locked were not telling the truth. That would mean that Mrs. Underwood, the butler and Vance all lied, and that they were all mixed up in the thing. That won't stand for a moment. The door was locked, when they tried

it, later they broke in and the key was in the lock, inside. Of course, whoever shot Underwood had to leave the room. The question is, with both the door and the windows locked on the inside as we found them, how did he get out?"

"Yes," I repeated eagerly, "how did he get out?"

Bartley threw back his head and laughed. "At present I am afraid you will have to wonder, Pelt. How the person left the room I cannot say. I believe without a doubt that whoever the person was, he walked in through the door. I believe also that it was some one that Underwood expected and knew. To climb in through the window would have meant that he would have been seen by Underwood, and he would not have been seated calmly at his desk if an intruder came in that way. But how the murderer left the room with everything locked as they found it the next morning is the question we must solve."

"But maybe everything was not locked," I ventured.

"Well," replied Bartley, "if it was not, then some one did not tell the truth. Vance tried the windows, the butler saw him do so, and when he came in the room tried them himself. Mrs. Underwood says they were locked. The chief of police and Sullivan found them locked, so it seems as if we must take their words for it. Then again there was no purpose in any one's saying that the door and windows were locked if they were not. If these were locked to make it appear suicide, then the gun would have been left in the room. If it was murder, then of course the murderer got out some way."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "the murderer was hiding in the room when they entered, and escaped."

"No, that is impossible. There was not a place large enough to hide a cat in that room. Then again you forget that the three persons who entered the room first saw no one, and that from the time they entered there has been some one there. So far we cannot say any one is mixed up in the case. Every one is under suspicion, and every one is presumed to have told the truth. The servants, I may say, are out of it. Vance seems innocent, a quiet secretary, in fact, wrapped up in his work. Every one just at present seems clear."

" You forget Robert Underwood," I added.

Bartley simply glanced at me and said, " Yes, I forgot him."

His pipe was out by this time, and he placed it back in his pocket and continued, " Now, of course, in every crime there has to be a motive. They say find the motive and you have found the criminal. But in this case we fail to find anything that suggests a convincing motive. True, the crime may have been committed for money, but all we have missing is the sum of three thousand dollars, and we are not sure that is missing. He may have disposed of it himself. And if I am right in thinking that he knew his murderer, and it was some one that he treated as a friend, then three thousand dollars seems rather a small amount for such a crime to have been committed."

I looked at him rather doubtfully. Seeing my look he smiled and said, " You think otherwise. Let's hear your opinion, Pelt."

" Well," I answered, " all evidence so far points" to the son. That he was on bad terms with his father we know, and also that he was in need of money. They had a quarrel and he shot him. Seeing the money, he took it. Then afterwards he hid the revolver, in a foolish place I will admit, but maybe he intended to come back for it. Then——"

Bartley, who had been listening with a little smile upon his lips, added, " Then not wishing to be seen by any one he went to the one place where his having a large sum of money would be promptly noted."

" He was not a professional criminal," I answered a little warmly. " If he had been he would not have made a mistake like that. But a young man like him is always sure to make some break that gives him away. Just see the facts against him. His need of money, his quarrel with his father, his being without money in the afternoon, and his playing with the bills of the size missing last night. To add to it all you have found the gun in his room."

Bartley gave a little sigh and rose to his feet. " How that district attorney will delight in your case. But

there are holes in it, Pelt. First of all you forget that you have little evidence that he quarrelled with his father last night. Vance only thinks he heard their voices. Then again you do not *know* that he was 'broke.' And you have not proven that the gun found was left there by the young man. Anyway keep your theory to yourself for a few days. The local police are working on the case. God only knows what they will dig up, and theories like yours would be apt to turn their heads."

He walked to the window and stood looking out at the night. Turning at last he said, "It all sounds rather mixed up, I will agree. But let us wait till morning and see what the inquest will bring forth. I have an idea that when it is over we will know more about the case than we do now. I think if I were you, Pelt, I would get a little sleep. You will have enough to do to-morrow. Your room is just off mine."

"Do you think——" I began.

Bartley took me by the shoulder, and leading me to a door pushed me into the room beyond it. With his hand on the door, he said, laughing, "Never mind what I think. Maybe to-morrow we will both be very much wiser. Better try to forget it all and get a little sleep." With that he said good-night and closed the door.

Though I was tired out, I found when I got in bed that I could not sleep. For a while I ran over in my mind the details of the day. Then I tried to discover the motive of the murder, I looked at it from every angle that I could think of, only to come to the conclusion that, take it all in all, the son would find it rather hard in explaining away the facts against him. From that my thoughts ran to other cases we had been on. Then it struck me that inasmuch as in other cases my theories had been wrong more times than they had been right, I might be at sea on this. So after a while I gave up thinking about it and tried to sleep.

But sometimes when one endeavours to sleep he finds that he is apt to end in being more awake than ever. So I found it, and the thousand and one things that rush over one's mind at such times came into mine. But

after a while I began to think of Bartley and to run over my friendship with him.

I had known Bartley for some years ; in fact, ever since I was a freshman at college. Later, when a reporter just breaking into the newspaper game in New York, I had been detailed to write up one of the cases he was on. Out of it grew a friendship, which resulted in the end with my going to work with Bartley as his assistant. The strangest thing about Bartley, for those that knew him and the history of his family, was the fact that he had become a criminal investigator. He came from that well-known New England family of Bartleys, a family that went back to the *Mayflower*, and numbered in its long list of well-known names, lawyers, clergymen, even several bishops, and a governor or so. Even those who met him for the first time would hardly believe when informed of his profession. With his tall figure, and scholarly face, the general air of good breeding that he had inherited from his ancestors, most people took him for a professor or a lawyer. Others noticing his nervous hands, with the long fingers, were sure he was a surgeon. And once, to my great glee, a very devout and religious woman whom we met on the ship while crossing to England assured the first cabin that she knew he was a bishop. Few ever guessed his real profession, and even some of his best-known friends never dreamed that he was the John Bartley that the papers spoke of so often in connection with the great criminal cases.

Perhaps in the beginning Bartley himself never intended to take up the line that he did. He graduated from Harvard at an early age, where he specialized in literature. Then came a course in the law school, in which at the same time he carried on original work in chemistry. Then followed several years abroad when he devoted himself to chemistry and literature. After that he came to New York, living in the old family home, that had come to him, in Gramercy Square. Having all the money that he wished, he turned his attention to books. His library, which overruns all the rooms of his house, is one of the best known of its kind. His collection of

early French memoirs, and of old trials and legal cases, is considered to-day the best in the country. But he did not neglect his love for chemistry, and published several monographs on rare and little known poisons.

It was his knowledge of poisons that brought him into his first criminal case. There had been a murder, in which the city detectives found themselves at sea. Some one happened to remember that Bartley knew more about poisons than any one else in the city. He was called in, and by his aid the case was solved. After that, on several occasions his aid was sought, and given. But not till he solved the Duveen case, which had baffled all the detectives who worked upon it, did he become known as a great criminal investigator. After that, his services were sought more and more in mysteries that others could not solve. The excitement of such a career, the opportunity that it gave him to use his knowledge and gifts, the chance of matching his brain against others, was one that he welcomed, and in the end, he became known as the most resourceful private detective in the country.

After much vague reminiscing over Bartley's career, I fell asleep at last, just when I cannot tell. Neither can I tell how long I slept. My sleep was rather restless, nor was it very sound, for suddenly I was awakened. Half asleep I wondered what it was that had caused me to wake up. I seemed to remember a noise, but it was vague and indistinct, more like the rustling of the wind than anything else. For a while I pondered over it, reaching the conclusion that after all I had heard nothing, finally settled myself again to sleep.

But before I could close my eyes I was made wide awake by another sound. It was not a loud noise, but the house was still and I heard it plainly. It was the sound of a clicking door latch. I lay still for a moment, wondering what the sound meant. Then I got out of bed and stood hesitating in the centre of the room. I was not sure if the sound had come from the floor beneath, or from the hall, though it seemed to me that it had come from the hall.

I went to the door leading to the hall and listened, but heard nothing. Softly I opened the door, but again

heard nothing. After a moment I stepped quietly into the hall. It was dark, so dark that I could hardly distinguish the wall by my side, and it was silent, not a sound coming from the rooms that faced the hall. I felt my way to the rail that lined the top of the stairs. Finding it, I peered into the darkness of the floor beneath. I could see and hear nothing. I stood for a moment with my hand resting on the rail, thinking. That I had heard a door close, was certain. It was rather late for any one to be wandering through the house and whoever had closed the door had done it softly, but had been betrayed by the latch clicking into place. But where the sound had come from I did not know, and at last I went back into my room.

I was about to get back into bed, when suddenly, obeying an impulse, I turned and went again to the door and glanced down the hall. To my utter astonishment, even while I gazed out into the darkness, my eyes caught a flash of light thrown upward on the ceiling. It lasted but the merest part of a second and then was gone. But it had been a ray of light and though faint it had pierced the darkness of the hall.

Quickly I ran to the head of the stairs and eagerly looked down their long length. But the darkness was intense, and I could see nothing. Yet there was no doubt that the light had come from the floor beneath. What did it mean? Whoever was down there was quiet enough, for though I listened very carefully I did not hear a sound. For a moment I thought of waking Bartley, but I realized that time was precious and then if there was anything worth discovering I wished to do it alone.

So carefully, in order to make no noise, I groped my way down the dark stairs. Feeling my way along the wall, I came to the door of the library, or where I expected to find it; my hand encountered the air, and I knew the door was open. It had been closed, but now it was open. I could now make out very faintly the form of the open doorway. I wondered who had opened it and what reason any one should want to enter the room. After a moment I decided to enter the library

myself. As I placed my feet over the threshold the thought came to me that it was rather a foolish thing to do. I was in my pyjamas, my gun up in the room. I think that my idea was to turn on the light, but I found that I did not know where the switch was located. It seemed that I remembered that somewhere by the desk I had seen a push button. But the room was very dark, and though I could just dimly make out the space of the window I was unable to distinguish anything.

I could not see the form of the desk at first, but I knew where it was, and made my way towards it. I had almost reached it when I seemed to become aware that there was some one else in the room. I remembered that there had been a fire in the fireplace, when I had last been in the library, and I looked for it. I saw, however, but the tip of one tiny coal, a mere point of light almost dead. I moved again slowly, and as I did so I caught my foot in the edge of a rug and almost fell, being thrown against the desk. I knew that if I had been undiscovered before that my presence in the room was now known.

As I righted myself I heard a quick catching of some one's breath. It was some little way from me. I shifted my position at once, going around to the other side of the desk. My ears caught a faint sound, and it seemed that the unknown person had moved. By this time I had given up all idea of turning on the lights. The only thing I wished to do was to get back to the door and close it and then get Bartley. I had no shoes on and felt that I could move softly. I listened carefully but heard nothing, though all the time I could feel the presence of the other person.

Though I could not be sure, it seemed to me that the noise I heard had come from somewhere near the fireplace, though it was so dark that I could see nothing there. Carefully I started to move, then stopped, for I had heard a faint rustle, the sound a person will make drawing their feet over the floor. It sounded a little nearer than it had before and came from a different direction. For a moment I was puzzled, and wondered

if there was more than one person in the room. Then I wondered what they were after. It seemed to me that the chances were that whoever was in the room, would not be very keen to be discovered, and that maybe, like myself, was trying to get away without being seen. If the person was endeavouring to reach the door then he was trying to escape without being seen. That made a new quandary, for if we both were trying to get out by the door we might run into each other.

Clearly the one thing for me to do was to reach the door first. First I thought I would make a run for it, then decided to move as quietly as I could. I had taken but three steps, pausing between each one, when I tripped over a foot. Instinctively I threw out my arm to save myself from falling, and my hand encountered a man's coat.

I almost fell. Before I was able to steady myself, my arm was seized in a strong grip. Twisting, I managed to free myself, but the coat of my pyjamas was torn from my back, and left in the man's hand. I twirled around, steadying myself, and the next moment we were locked in each other's arms.

Even in the very first moment of the encounter, I realized that the odds were against me. Whoever my opponent was, he was taller than I and heavier, and possessed of great strength. With his arms around me he made it almost impossible for me to move, and tried to throw me to the floor. I freed one hand and grabbed for his throat, but he broke the grip loose. Slowly he bore me backward, though I managed to keep on my feet. But, try as I could, I was not able to break the circle of his arms.

Suddenly I felt the edge of the desk cut into my back. Slowly and silently the pressure of his body forced me backward. The sharp edge of the desk was cutting into my back, and it felt like the edge of a knife. I knew that I could stand this but a moment, and tried to wriggle out of his grasp. But it was no use, and if he had not shifted the position of his arm and seized me by the throat, it would have been all over in a moment. As it was, it gave me but a moment's grace. Vainly I

struggled to escape the increasing pressure, but the grip tightened, and again I was pushed against the edge of the desk. I felt that resistance was useless and was about to give up, when suddenly I heard what seemed to be a gasp of surprise coming from the direction of the door. It was as if some one about to step into the room had discovered our presence and was startled.

This roused me to a frenzy, and gave me for the moment a new strength. I knew that if there were two men against me I was lost, for I was hardly able to hold my own with one. With a burst of strength, I struck the hand from my throat and managed to struggle loose. Then I threw myself at my unknown opponent, and drove with my clenched fist, in what I thought was the right direction. The darkness made the blow uncertain, but my hand struck his shoulder, struck with force enough to cause him to stagger. I rushed in on him, trying to overpower him before he could recover, but the blow had done little harm, for his fist caught me on the chest. For a second or so we sparred wildly in the dark most of our blows doing little damage and failing to land. But as he rushed into me, I landed full on his face with what should have been force enough to down him. Though he did not fall, yet the force of the blow drove him back.

I rushed in at him, to take advantage of his loss of balance. Before I reached him, there came the short, sharp spit of a revolver. The darkness, pierced by the flame for the merest part of a second, revealed the lower part of a man's face, hidden by a dark beard.

I decided that it was about over. There was little I could do against a revolver, and I started to move aside, fearing a second shot. But he did not fire again, but came at me with a rush that almost carried me off my feet. I tried to escape his fists, but in vain. A blow having behind it the full weight of his body reached me flush on the point of the jaw, actually carrying me off my feet. As I staggered there came a heavy blow on the back of my head. I remember thinking vaguely that I had struck the edge of the desk in my fall, then a blinding flash of light, fading away into darkness, and I knew no more.

CHAPTER VI

ROBERT UNDERWOOD COMES HOME

SLOWLY my bewildered brain began feebly to struggle back into consciousness. I seemed to hear, first of all, the sound of voices, but they sounded faint and far away. I opened my eyes for a second, but the light of the room blinded them, and I closed them for a while to find, when I did open them, that Bartley was bending over me. I tried to smile, and he smiled back, saying, "Feel better? That was a hard blow you received."

For an answer I struggled to my feet, and feeling rather faint, dropped into the chair near by; the chair in which we had found Underwood. Then for the first time I noticed the butler standing near by, a basin in his hand and a towel over his arm. I started to ask,

"The man—"

"He got away; we could find no trace of him," Bartley replied, not waiting for me to finish. "Are you able to tell what happened?"

To tell the truth, I felt a little shaky, and my head was paining a bit, but I thought I would soon feel like myself. Putting my hand to the back of my head I found I had a rather large and sore lump, but when I withdrew my hand and looked at it there was no blood on it. Observing my gesture, Bartley smiled.

"It's not a cut; you are not seriously hurt, only were knocked out for a moment or so. But how did it happen?"

So with Bartley on the edge of the table and the butler standing by with an interested look on his serious face, I told my story.

Bartley listened carefully, but did not interrupt me. Just as I finished, Vance came into the room and, in reply to a look from Bartley, said,

"The chauffeurs and the watchman have looked over

the grounds but they found nothing, nor did they see any one."

"I did not expect they would," was the reply, and turning to the butler Bartley told him that he would not need either Vance or himself any longer.

After they left the room he turned to me, having drawn a chair up to my side.

"I want us to go over this thing here; we can cover the ground better by being in the room where it took place. Now I myself was awakened by a shot. It was not very loud, nor was I sure that it was in the house. I jumped from the bed and heard the sound of something falling to the floor. It must have been you. The sound came from downstairs, so I rushed out in the hall, down the stairs. At the bottom I paused a moment, but heard not a sound. Then I entered the library, and turned on the lights, and of course saw you were on the floor. It took but a second to see that you were only stunned, and I knew that you would be all right in a little while. So I rang for the butler, leaving you in his care while I looked over the house. That is, I looked downstairs, for I knew that no one had time enough to pass me while I was coming down the stairs. I had aroused Vance, and he was looking the grounds over at the same time. The result—nothing," and he threw out his hands with a rather expressive gesture.

Already I felt stronger, though my head still ached a little. I could see that Bartley was very keen to question me.

"Now we will start at the beginning again," said Bartley. "You were awakened by a noise, and you got up and went into the hall?"

"No," I said, "I did not get up and go into the hall then; it was after I had heard the sound again."

"Then," said Bartley, "you heard the sound of a door latch click. If you are sure, then it seems rather strange." He walked over and tried the latch of the library door. It made very little sound. "You would hardly hear that in your own room, with your own door closed," he said. "On that part of the second floor

where we were there are only two other rooms. Mrs. Underwood's rooms and the suite that her husband had are on the same floor, but are separated from ours by another hall. You could not have heard any sound from those. And Robert Underwood had the two rooms that were near us, and he is away. Are you sure you heard a door latch click?"

This rather ruffled me and I replied, rather warmly, "Absolutely. The first sound, the one that woke me up, I do not know what it was, but the second one was that of a door latch. I ought to know what I heard."

Bartley smiled a bit at the warmth of my answer. "You must be feeling better. So be it, it was a door latch then. Then you went out in the hall, went back to your room and then opened your door again. The light you saw was a mere flash, lasting but a second."

I nodded.

"No doubt it was a flashlight."

"But why," I asked, "would any one want to be in that room in the dark?"

Bartley looked at me and then replied: "It was easy to see a light there even if the door were closed. You know the panels were smashed when they broke in and found Underwood. But I have an idea that whoever was in the room had the idea that they could find what they wished without a light. Evidently they found they had to have a light later, and took the chance of being seen. So, one might add, whoever was in the room had been there before, and was familiar with it. So familiar that they could look for something in the dark. Now you say you heard nothing when you paused by the door, before you entered the room?"

"Yes," I answered. "The door was open. I remember I wondered a bit, for it was closed when we went to bed. Still I thought nothing of that. I listened for a while but heard nothing. In fact, it was not till I half fell over the rug there that I became aware that there was any one else in the room. Even then it was not because I heard any one, but rather I seemed to feel that some one was there."

Bartley nodded. "Then in a moment you distinctly heard some one move and the next you were struggling."

I nodded to this, and glanced at the desk. I gave a little shudder, for I still felt the pain where its keen edge had cut into my back. Bartley interrupted my train of thought.

"And what do you think knocked you out?" he asked, his keen eyes fixed on my face.

"Why, I was knocked off my feet and struck my head on the desk."

"Indeed," drawled Bartley.

I looked at him, catching from his tone an air of disagreement.

He shook his head. "You did not hit the desk at all when you fell. The blow on your head was caused by this." He reached his hand over to the desk and drew towards him the heavy gold inkstand, shaped like a lion's head. For a while he held it in his hand, studying it. Then glancing at me he said simply, "This was the thing that knocked you out."

In dazed wonder I could only look at the inkstand that Bartley held in his hand. It was a massive thing and must have weighed at least five pounds. He sat silent, enjoying my astonishment, with a little smile playing around his lips. Seeing that I had nothing to say, he added rather irreverently,

"I think that we will find this to be one of the most interesting cases that we have had in some time."

I turned and looked at the desk, for I could but think that I had hit it when I fell. Then I turned again and looked at the inkstand.

"But," I ventured, "if I was struck by that it means——"

"It means," replied Bartley, "there were at least two men in the room. When I came in I found you lying about three feet from the desk. You could not have hit it when you fell, for your head was pointing to the door. If you had struck the door, I think there is no doubt that you would have been found by the side of it. Also the sharp edge of the desk would have

given you a nasty cut instead of the lump that you have. Then I found this inkstand on the floor by your side, and there seems to be no doubt that it was the thing that knocked you out."

It seemed reasonable enough, and I could only reply, "It's strange."

A serious look came into Bartley's face, and he replied slowly, "There are several strange things about it. You see that to go to the desk in the dark and pick up the inkstand, for it was the only thing on it that could be used for a weapon, shows a rather striking knowledge of the room and its contents. A person in the room for the first time would hardly know that on the desk was the only weapon that he could use, nor would he be able to find it in the dark. Then after you were hit, both men speedily vanished, for I was down myself a moment after but there was no one here."

"What," I asked, "do you think they were after?"

"Well," he replied, "that's the question. It must have been something that was important for they would not have tried to come in here and take the chance of being found in the room. It might have been that money that Vance told about; it may have been left in the room. But if it was, the chances are that the persons found it. But why there were two people is the thing that bothers me."

He rose from his chair and walked over to the safe, which he examined for a while. Then he walked to the window and stood looking out at the night. After a while he turned and said,

"The thing I am unable to understand is your being so certain that you heard the sound of a door latch being closed. There is no one on your floor but you and me. Now, you may be mistaken—unless—I wonder if—yes, that must be it!" He rushed to the door, "Come on!" he called.

I followed him, and he hurried up the stairs, two steps at a time. Past the door of his room and the open one of mine he hurried to the end of the hall. Finding the door, he fumbled at the knob, and at last opened the

door with a fling. It took but a second to find the switch which flooded the room with light. In the first quick glance that I gave, I saw that it was the room of a college youth, picture bedecked and book strewn. Bartley did not stop in this room, but went to the open door that led to another room. Here he fumbled for the light, and when he turned it on I gave a sudden gasp of wonder. For upon the bed, his back turned towards us, and his head half covered by the bed clothes, was a young man asleep.

I turned to Bartley. Upon his face was a little smile, and he had to chuckle when he said, "It's about what I thought."

Disturbed by the light, the man on the bed turned over restlessly. I saw that he was only a boy, with his light hair tossed about his eyes. In a moment he was awake, staring at us. For a while he lay looking at us, then pulled himself up in the bed, and in an angry voice half yelled, "What in the devil are you doing in my room?"

Bartley took a step forward, and simply said, "Mr. Underwood."

The young man glared at us, and snapped, "Yes, my name is Underwood, but what is it to you? What are you doing in my room?"

I noticed that Bartley was watching him narrowly to see the effect of his answer. But even when he said, "I am John Bartley; it may be you have heard of me," the young man did not appear confused. He looked at us a moment, then got out of bed, and seated himself on the edge. And again I noticed that he was but a boy, with a youth's clear-cut features and candid eyes.

"The only John Bartley I ever heard of," he answered, "is a detective or something of the sort. I don't know him at all."

"Well," replied Bartley, "I am that chap."

Still Underwood did not seem startled, though a little look of wonder was on his face, while he asked, "What's up? Does father know that you are here?"

Bartley's reply came quickly. "No, he doesn't."

The young man rose to his feet. I could see that he was starting to get angry ; it showed in his voice when he spoke.

"Then what do you mean by coming in my room at this time of the night. Why are you in this house anyway ? "

Bartley, whose eyes had never left the young man's face, said slowly, " Because your father is dead."

Over the young man's face came a look of surprise that changed into horror. His jaw dropped and closed convulsively, his face twitched. He tried for a moment to speak, and at last stammered, " When—when did he die ? "

" He was murdered some time last night," came Bartley's reply in a cold, even tone.

The face of the young man grew white, then flushed a deep red. His lips trembled as he tried to speak and was unable to make a sound. His hand, resting on the bed, closed and unclosed. And then suddenly he threw himself down on the bed, his head in his arms, and commenced to sob. His body shook with the violence of his grief, but in a while his sobs stopped and he lay still. At last he turned and rose to a sitting position on the bed. His eyes were red from weeping, his face white, but he had composed his voice when he spoke,

" You will excuse me, but I was rather overcome with your news"—his voice broke again for a second ; but he continued : " It's rather a shock, for the last time I saw Father I never had the idea that I would never see him alive again."

" And when was that ? " Bartley queried.

" Last night," was the simple answer.

There happened to be but two chairs in the room, and Bartley seated himself on the nearest and motioned to me to take the other. He turned to Underwood.

" Mr. Underwood, I have been brought into the matter of your father's death, and there are some questions that I must ask you, and they may as well be asked now."

The young man nodded his assent. He seemed to act

frankly enough, but I had been impressed by the fact that he had not asked us who had killed his father. Also I could not forget that there were some rather damaging facts against him that he would have to explain. Yet all in all he seemed but a college youth, and his grief at his father's death had been real.

"Now," continued Bartley, "I thought that you were away on a yachting trip which was to last some days."

"I started on one," was the reply. "We left last night and ran into Block Island, intending to go from there up to the Maine coast. But this morning the engine went wrong, and finding that we could not get it fixed for a number of days we called the whole thing off. We got back here rather late, and I came right home."

"Did you come directly up to your rooms?" asked Bartley.

Underwood nodded, then added, "Yes. I found I did not have my key and was afraid I would rouse the whole house, but, strange to say, the front door was slightly open; not locked at all."

Bartley leaned back in his chair, and his voice was eager as he asked, "You found the door open?"

The youth nodded.

"Is that not rather a strange thing? You are not in the habit of leaving it unlocked? I thought the butler was presumed to look after the doors."

"He is," answered Underwood. "I thought it was strange when I found the door open. I came up the front steps and reached for the door knob, only to find the door was open about an inch. I wondered a bit at this, for the last thing the butler does is to make the rounds of the doors and windows before he goes to bed."

I glanced at Bartley. He had thrown his head back in the chair, and his eyes were closed. He opened them to ask:

"Did you lock the door after you came in?"

"Yes."

"And you came direct to your room? Did you notice that any one was in the hall? Or did you hear any one in the library when you passed? It was there they found your father."

The young man gave a shudder, and was silent for a moment.

"I came right up. Did not turn on the light but went at once to my room, and right to bed. I was pretty tired, and fell asleep in a moment." His voice broke and he continued a little wildly. "But if I had known——" and he strangled back a sob.

A softer expression came into Bartley's face, and going over to the boy he placed his hand on his shoulder. "Yes," he said, "if you had known. Life itself revolves around that expression."

For a while there was silence, Bartley standing and looking down at Underwood, who had buried his head in his hands. Finally, going back to his chair, Bartley spoke,

"What time was it when you saw your father last night?"

"You mean the last time?" asked the boy, looking up.

"I mean the last time, and for that matter all the times that you saw him last night."

"Well," came the reply, "I saw him after dinner about eight, and then some time a little after ten. That was in the library."

"Now," asked Bartley, "what were you talking about?"

The face of the young man flushed red. He half rose to his feet, and I could see that he was angry at the question. His voice was raised a little as he answered,

"I fail to see what right you have to ask that. Whatever we talked about was entirely a private matter between us two."

Bartley smiled, a little amused smile, and his voice was soft as he answered,

"I am willing to assume that it was a private matter, and you do not have to tell me concerning your conversation, unless you wish. But, so far, you seem to be the

last one that saw your father alive, and if I were in your place I would be frank and answer all that I ask you. It may be easier to explain some things now than it will be later."

Underwood's face went white while Bartley was speaking, and the horror was expressed in his voice as he stammered, "You don't mean—that any one—any one dares say that I killed my father?"

He rose to his feet, his fists clenched tight, and stood towering over Bartley. His eyes flashed his anger, and his voice trembled with rage as he tried to speak.

"Who dared say that I killed my father? How could they, who dared——"

"No one," said Bartley with a weary tone, pushing the boy back on the bed. "No one—" he paused, and then added significantly, "as yet." He waited for a second, as if he wished the boy to understand what he had just said, and then continued :

"But if you get in a rage every time some one asks you a question, some one will. For you know there seems to be one or two things that people will expect you to answer, and a little frankness now may save you much trouble later on. For I want you to remember that, after all, I wish to help you as much as I can, and frankness with me may save you a great deal of trouble later."

Underwood's anger seemed to leave him, and I fancied that he felt a bit ashamed at his outburst of a moment before, for he said meekly enough, "I will answer any questions that you wish, sir. You see Father had been a little angry with me, since I was thrown out of college. He wanted me to return, but I wished to try my hand at the flying game."

And then Bartley, smiling, added, "And, I expect, he also blamed you for gambling."

The face of the young man flushed, but his eyes met ours. "Yes, he did. I played quite a lot in June, but I had no luck, and when Father heard that I was going to Clark's he cut off my allowance and said a few hot things to me."

"Did he forbid your staying at the house?" asked Bartley.

"Not exactly. It was like this. I went to him several times for money, and when he found out what I wanted it for he was angry. We had a few words, and I said that I would stay with a few friends in a camp on the shore. I told him that I would stay there a while, and he retorted"—and the boy's face grew crimson—"that I better stay till I learned a little sense."

"And what brought you back?" was the question.

Underwood smiled, for the first time since we had entered the room—a boyish smile that lighted up his whole face. "I saw what a fool I had been."

Bartley looked amused at the answer, and then asked, "And last night when you saw your father did you have any quarrel, raise your voices or the like?"

"No, sir. For a moment Father seemed rather excited, may be I better say surprised. But we soon fixed things up. I told him that I was sorry I had acted the part of the fool, and that I was willing to go back to college. That seemed to please him, and in the end we were on good terms."

"And you had no loud words?"

"No," answered Underwood. "When I first came in Father raised his voice, and said, 'I thought you were going to stay with your friends.' But maybe it was because he was disturbed over something. He has been disturbed, nervous and irritable all the summer. I don't know what over though."

Bartley moved uneasily in his chair, and the interested look came back to his face, as he asked, "You say he has been disturbed all the summer over something. What do you mean?"

"Well," answered Underwood, "Father was always a very busy man, but he was always cheerful. But this summer I noticed a change. There were many days that he did not seem to care to talk with any one. He would lose his temper—a rather strange thing for him. He became tired, and I got the idea that he was worried—anyway he seemed to age."

Bartley was silent after the boy closed, and it was a number of minutes before he asked,

"How long did you stay with him?"

"Not very long; he gave me some money, and asked me about the trip, wishing me good luck. I did not ask him for the money, and he only said, 'Don't play all this away.' I doubt if I was in the library over thirty minutes in all."

"How much money did he give you?" came the question.

"Five hundred dollars, in fifty-dollar bills. He took it out of his pocket, saying I would wish some money. He had a thin package of bills, and gave me half of them."

Bartley shot a quick glance at me. Underwood seemed to be candid enough, but I wondered what had become of the rest of the money that Vance said he had given him. But my thoughts were broken by Bartley's voice:

"You then went out. Did he seem rather eager to have you go?"

The boy looked startled at the question.

"I don't understand how you knew that," he said, "but I thought he wanted me to go. How did you know?"

Bartley smiled. "Oh, it was a venture. Did you see any one when you went out?"

"No one."

I did not expect the next question which was: "By the way, do you own a revolver?"

The young man did not answer at first, and to me seemed to hesitate longer than was necessary before replying, and when he did speak said, "No."

"Well," said Bartley, "that is all I want to know to-night. We had better all get some sleep."

CHAPTER VII

THE PROBE OF THE LAW

I WAS aroused the next morning by the sun, which had found its way into my room and was shining in my eyes. For a while I ran over in my mind the many events of the previous night, building up theories only to discard them in the end.

I pondered over things for a while and at last arose and dressed. Going to the door of Bartley's room, I opened it and peered within, only to find it empty. I went out into the hall, down the stairs, pausing for a moment to look at the library door, which was closed. Before I got to the front of the house I was met by the butler, whose silent, expressionless face seemed even more sober than it had been the night before. He bowed and said, "I will serve your breakfast in just a moment, sir."

I followed him into the dining-room. Seating myself, I picked up a paper that was folded by my plate. Because of some serious labour troubles, the story of the murder, which on any other day would have been given the chief place in the paper, was on the third page. When I came to that page my eyes met the following headlines :

JOHN UNDERWOOD MURDERED

WEALTHY FINANCIER FOUND DEAD AT HIS SUMMER HOME

Murderer and Motive Unknown

There was little need for me to read the short account of the crime, for I knew that the news had been kept back, till just about the time the morning papers would

be going to press, and that but little news had been given out anyway. The half column account was devoted more to Underwood's life than his death, and no other facts relating to the case were chronicled than the bare statement of the headlines.

I smiled a bit as I pictured the scene in the office of the paper when the news of the crime came in over the press wire. There would be just the mere fact of the murder, and the paper would be on the verge of going to press. The rest of the article was simply a story of Underwood's life, and a guess at the amount of his wealth. Also there was a rather long account of his marriage.

The butler coming in at this time caused me to drop the paper and turn my attention to my breakfast. I had just finished my grape fruit when Bartley came in. He was in a rare humour, and I could tell that he must be pleased with something, but what over I did not know.

The butler had started to pour my coffee when Bartley asked him :

" By the way, Williams, you locked up last night ? "

The old man turned.

" Oh, yes, sir, as I always do."

" And you are sure you locked the doors ? "

" Yes, sir."

" And if some one said they found the front door unlocked and even open early in the morning, what would you say ? "

The butler looked rather puzzled, started to speak, and then paused for a moment, hesitating, and said,

" I locked it, sir, and unlocked it when I came down this morning, but if any one had found it open it would have been the second time, sir."

The amused air that Bartley had been wearing vanished in a second at the answer. His voice was eager as he asked,

" What do you mean ? "

Again the butler hesitated before replying,

" I mean, sir, that several weeks ago I came down one

morning and a window in the dining-room was open. Not very much, sir, but as I had locked it the night previous I wondered how it got opened. And at the same time the front door that I had locked the night before was unlocked and slightly open."

"Did you tell any one about it?" asked Bartley.

"Not at first, sir. You see, I thought maybe I had overlooked it. But when several days later I found another window open I changed my mind, for this time I was sure that I had locked it. I looked the silver and things over, but there was not a thing missing."

After the butler had gone Bartley turned to me. "Pelt, I wish that you would say nothing about what took place last night in the library. I have told Vance and William to say nothing. At present we can not explain what happened, who hit you, or, above all, what they were after. What it was, there is no doubt they did not have time to get it, for you came in on them too soon."

He picked up the paper, saying, "I gave the papers a hint of the murder last night. The reporters are already here, and I have talked with them. There was not much to tell them, however." Presently Bartley turned to me again and said, "It may amuse you to know that I was offered another case this morning before breakfast. Of course I refused it. Just another of those jewellery robberies. You know the Winslows; he is mixed up with the copper crowd on the street. His wife went to a dance at the club two nights ago, and she came home to find that all her jewels were gone. It was not a big haul, about fifteen thousand dollars in all. The detective handling the case wanted me in consulting capacity. But I told him I was tied up here. It was rather ordinary anyway."

At that moment Vance came in sight, the same calm figure of the night before, his manner slow. Yet there was something about him that gave me the impression that there was far more life in him than I thought he had from his looks. From behind his slightly tinted glasses I caught the glint of a keen pair of eyes, eyes

that had a sharpness that did not go with the apparent calmness of his manner. With a quick glance that took us all in, he said,

"The coroner is here, sir, and says that the inquest is ready to begin. He asked me to find you, Mr. Bartley, and tell you."

Bartley rose, going to the window.

"Very well, Vance, and, by the way, do you know who lives in the bungalow across the way?"

The secretary shot a quick glance at the house that was pointed out; in fact, I did myself. It was a half-stone, half-wooden bungalow, and was about five hundred yards away. It was on the next estate, if one could call it that, to Underwood's, and a great stone wall stood between the two grounds. Vance, I thought, hesitated before he spoke.

"The house belongs to the Holt estate, but this year it is being occupied by Arthur Ransome, the actor—" he paused for a moment, and then added, "He is an old friend of Mr. and Mrs. Underwood and has spent a good deal of time here this summer."

When I started to follow Vance from the room, Bartley signalled me to remain. When Vance was out of hearing, he said,

"We will take that remark about Ransome being a friend of Underwood's with a grain of salt. I have already knowledge of him from Robert. He knows Mrs. Underwood all right; in fact, he played in vaudeville with her, in an act he wrote himself, about a year before Underwood married her. But he is not the kind of a chap that Underwood would bother with. After Mrs. Underwood was married, Ransome settled down in New York. Still I don't know much against him, except that Underwood did not have much to do with him. It must cost Ransome a pretty bit of money to rent that place for the season. His excuse for being here is that he has a play that opens at one of Underwood's theatres this season. But we better not keep the coroner waiting."

We went out of the room, down through the hall, to the library. From within came the hum of voices. It

was fairly well filled, mostly with men, and, as all curious spectators had been forbidden, most of the men evidently had business there.

About the first person that I recognized was young Underwood, who was standing alone near the window. When he saw us, he came over at once. Though he had taken pains with his dress, it was plain to see that he was ill at ease and nervous. He nodded to me, and then Bartley drew him to one side, where they talked in a low tone for several moments. As Bartley turned to greet the coroner, who was approaching him, I heard him say to the young man, "Don't worry, or lose your nerve, and it will come out all right." But even these words, at which he again gave his forced smile, did not seem to re-assure him very much.

The coroner, who had now come over, impressed me a bit better than he had done the night before ; perhaps it was because he had been shaved and was wearing another suit. Still at the best he did not impress me as being any better than the average coroner, who had been given his job because of politics. Standing with him was District Attorney Sullivan, who had brought us into the case, and who now informed us that so far the police had done very little, and that they had no ideas regarding the crime at all. He added that the inquest would be a mere formality, for there was little to go on, and very little evidence to hear. I judged from this that he had a rather poor opinion of the local police.

The coroner now at the desk rapped for order.

Bartley had managed to secure two chairs, near one of the windows, where he was able to take in the whole room at a glance, and at the same time be half hidden by the draperies.

A coroner's inquest is a queer thing at the best, and this one was not the best. To start with, the average coroner is a man of little ability, who holds his office because of politics. He is dealing with a crime that calls for a many-sided knowledge, and one that as a rule a coroner never has. The average coroner's jury, which is not used in all States, as a rule, does not rank up

with the coroner himself in intelligence. They are as a rule made up of men with nothing to do, broken down business men and political hangers-on. Bartley had often said that we needed a trained body of men, who had some knowledge of law, a bit of medicine and science, who had been educated to act as jurymen. And when I looked this jury over, I decided that he was right.

The coroner then rose, and, after a rather impressive gaze around the room, stated in a few words the object of the inquest. He then told us that he would first call as a witness District Attorney Sullivan.

While Sullivan was taking his place, which was a chair by the side of the coroner, I glanced around the room. There was, if we excepted the jury, only a few in it. I noticed young Underwood, his face rather white, and appearing a little uneasy. Across from him was Vance, with his face expressionless. There were also near by three or four old men, but the only one that I knew was the butler. Near the coroner sat half a dozen reporters, some of which I knew, and who smiled a greeting across at me.

Sullivan's testimony was brief, he having the ability to say what he knew in a few words. In response to the coroner's questions he stated that he had received a 'phone call about nine-thirty the previous day, asking him to come over at once to the Underwood residence.

"Do you know who sent the message?" asked the coroner.

"No," was the answer, "nor did I know what was wanted till I reached the house." He paused, waiting for the next question.

"Tell us what you found when you reached the house."

"Well," said Sullivan, "the butler opened the door. He seemed rather broken up. Almost behind him was Mr. Vance, who told me that Mr. Underwood had killed himself. The chief of police had also been called and arrived shortly before me. He was accompanied by Patrolman Jenkins. They knew that I was on the way and waited until I came before inspecting the premises. The butler took us to the library, showing us the door

with a broken panel and telling us that they had smashed it in order to get into the room. He said the door was locked in the inside, and that all they had to do was smash a panel and reach in and turn the key. The key was still in the door. Mr. Underwood was sitting in a chair by his desk. He was dead, a bullet hole in his head. We made a search of the room, but found nothing that would throw any light upon the affair. Though Mr. Underwood had been shot, yet we were unable to find the revolver."

"Did you ask if any of those who entered the room the first time had seen a revolver?"

"I did, but the butler and Vance both said that they had not seen one."

"And what about the windows?" asked the coroner.

"They were locked, fastened on the inside."

The foreman of the jury, who had been listening very closely, here asked,

"I take it you mean they were locked when you looked at them."

Bartley turned to me with an approving smile. "The foreman shows that he has a head."

Sullivan turned in his chair. "Yes, naturally, I mean I found them locked. I know nothing, personally, as to how they were when the man was found dead. But I was told that nothing in the room had been changed, that everything had been left as they found it. Both the butler and Mr. Vance said they found the windows locked when they tried to enter the room. Mrs. Underwood was with them at the time, they told me."

The coroner consulted a paper that he had, then asked, "Who were in the room with you?"

"Simply Vance, the butler, Jenkins and the chief."

The next question came as a surprise to me.

"You said that Mr. Vance told you that it was a case of suicide. Did you receive that impression yourself?"

"Yes," came the response, "though, as I remember, I think he used the expression, that he 'thought it was suicide.' I myself for a while agreed with him."

"What caused you to change your mind?"

Sullivan did not answer for a moment, and when he did he spoke very slowly.

"When I first saw the room I found that the windows were locked, locked on the inside. I was told that they had found them that way, when they tried to get in. Then they said the door was also locked, locked on the inside, with the key in the lock. Nothing had been touched in the room. Naturally knowing that it was impossible for any one to leave the room, and at the same time have the doors and windows locked on the inside, my first thought was suicide. There was no other way out of the room, except by the door or the windows; they were locked—therefore, suicide. But if that was the case, we should have found the revolver. It was not in the room. I was told that they had not found one when they broke in. There is one other thing that also caused me to change my mind. If Mr. Underwood had shot himself, there should have been traces of the powder on his face. It was unmarked. So, taking all those things into consideration, I now believe that he was murdered."

I shot a glance at Bartley, who smiled. I knew that he was thinking that Sullivan had not reached that decision until he, Bartley, had suggested it. This finished Sullivan's testimony.

The chief and Jenkins testified in turn and corroborated Sullivan's testimony in every detail.

The coroner, after a glance at the paper in his hand, then called out the name of Dr. Drew. The doctor was a young man, maybe thirty-five years old, clean shaven, with a keen, intellectual face. He gave me the impression that he knew his business. Aside from the technical phrases that doctors love to use, and which I have forgotten, his testimony given in a clear, crisp voice was as follows:

"I was called on the 'phone yesterday morning, a little before nine o'clock, and asked to come at once to Mr. Underwood's. When I arrived, I was shown into the library by Mr. Vance, who told me at the door that Mr.

Underwood was dead. I found him sitting in the chair by his desk. A glance told me that he had been dead for some hours. I took pains not to disturb the body or molest anything in the room."

At this point the coroner asked him to describe the wound, which he did, in language which was rather obtuse, but which might be given in these words: "The bullet entered above his right temple, and passing downward slightly passed through his brain to the back of his head. His death must have been instantaneous."

"Could the wound be self-inflicted?" asked the coroner.

"I would say not, though there is a faint possibility that it could. But I would say it would be almost impossible to fire the shot, that is to have had Mr. Underwood do it, without his leaving some trace of powder, or burning the skin. I mean if it was self-inflicted. Then again death would have come so quickly that the fingers would have retained their grip on the gun. I myself would say that the shot was fired some feet away and not by Mr. Underwood himself."

"Then you say he was murdered?" said the coroner.

"Well," answered the doctor, "the evidence I found would not indicate that he shot himself."

"Did you reach any conclusion as to how long he had been dead?"

The doctor nodded. "I should say that he had been dead about ten hours. It's rather hard to say exactly how long a man has been dead, but we can come very near the time. It was just about nine o'clock in the morning when I first saw the body. From the changes that had taken place in the body I fixed the time when he was killed as some time about the hour of eleven the night before."

Bartley, who had followed the doctor's testimony very carefully, nodded his head at the last statement, in agreement.

"You performed the autopsy last night. Did you find anything to change your first impression?"

The doctor fumbled in his pocket and brought forth

an object that was wrapped in tissue paper, which he unrolled before he spoke. "I did not change my opinion, either of the manner of his death or the time, but I found this."

Everybody in the room was craning their necks to see what the object was that the doctor had handed the coroner. In a second I saw that it was a bullet, which the coroner fingered a moment and then silently handed to the foreman. Then in a few sentences bristling with medical terms the doctor described the course of the bullet and the position in the head where he had found it.

The last question that was asked him was, "And you would say that Mr. Underwood's death was caused by this bullet?"

"Yes," was the answer, and with that he was dismissed from the box.

For a few moments the district attorney and the coroner engaged in a whispered conversation that at times seemed to grow rather animated. The district attorney several times shook his head, and once brought his fist down on the table. I began to wonder what it was all about and who the next witness would be, when the name of George Vance was called.

I happened to be looking directly at Underwood as Vance rose slowly to his feet and walked to the desk. Up to this time the young man had apparently been little interested in the proceeding, or if he had been he concealed his feelings, sitting back in his chair with a rather listless air. But with the calling of Vance I saw a change. His body stiffened, and I saw his hands clench at the arm of the chair. As Vance, after being sworn in, dropped into the chair, he turned and for a moment his eyes met Underwood's. The expression upon his face was hard to analyse, and I glanced back at Underwood. Upon his face there was the faintest sign of a sneer, and his eyes did not leave Vance, who in a moment turned away. Underwood had outstared him. The action all took place in the barest part of a moment and was so barely noticeable that I almost wondered if I had not been mistaken. But glancing at Bartley,

I found that his eyes were fixed on Vance, and I knew that he had noticed it also. For a moment I wondered what it might indicate. Apparently the feeling between Underwood and his father's secretary was rather strained. But what it might mean I did not know. But whatever my thoughts might have been, I never knew, for the next moment Vance commenced his testimony.

He gave his answers in a rather low voice, speaking very slowly, and using his words with much care. More than once, before he left the box, it seemed to me that he was not answering the coroner's questions as fully as he might. But I might have been wrong in this impression.

In answer to the first question he stated that he was twenty-six years of age, a graduate of Williams College, and that for the last two years he had been Underwood's private secretary, at a salary of \$3,000 a year. His duties were the usual ones of a secretary. He paused after this, waiting for the next question. In fact, what information the coroner got out of him he had to ask for, for Vance himself never volunteered any.

The coroner said : "Tell us in your own way of your discovery of Mr. Underwood's body."

Vance settled himself back in his chair, and after a moment's thought commenced : "It was always Mr. Underwood's custom, while here, to have his breakfast at eight. He was very prompt in being at the table at that time, and disliked very much to have me late, I being supposed to eat with him. Yesterday morning when at 8.30 he had not come down, I thought that he might have overslept. I went to his rooms and knocked at the door. There was no answer, and I knocked again. Then as he still did not answer I tried the door, and finding it unlocked opened it. He was not in his room, and the bed had not been slept in. I then asked Williams to find out from Mrs. Underwood's maid if he was with her. But the maid returned and said that Mrs. Underwood had not seen him since dinner the night before. I then went down to the library, but the door was locked. This was so unusual that I began to

wonder, and to be a little alarmed. Knowing that I could obtain a view of the room by looking through the windows, I called Williams and we went to the front of the house. The windows, as you can see, are too high for one to see into the room without using a ladder. So Williams secured a ladder and I climbed up and looked into the library. I could, of course, see very plainly everything in the room. Mr. Underwood was seated at his desk."

"Did you know then that he was dead?" came the question.

Vance answered a little warmly, "Of course not. Though after I had tapped on the window and he made no response I began to think that there was something wrong. I tapped again, and still no response."

"Did you try to enter the room through the windows?"

"Yes, but I could not raise them; they were locked."

Bartley rose at this and went over to the coroner. The jury watched him with interest, no doubt wondering who he was; but the reporters gave him one look, and then started to write in great haste. They recognized the fact that if Bartley was in the case there must be something up. For a few moments he talked to the coroner in a low tone that no one could hear. As he came back to his seat the coroner asked Vance,

"Tell us just how you made sure the windows were locked?"

"There are three windows," said Vance. "The ladder was up against the centre window. I tried that and it was locked. Then I reached over and tried the other two, but was not able to move them; they were locked. I found later when we looked at the windows after we reached the room that they were locked. Williams then went up the ladder and also tried the windows. He suggested that Mrs. Underwood had better be notified. So we went in the house, and I notified Mrs. Underwood. She came downstairs and ordered me to break down the door. I got a hatchet and smashed the panel, and put my arm through. The key was in the lock, and all I

had to do was unlock the door. We entered the room and found that Mr. Underwood was dead."

He paused for a moment, and the room waited for the next question.

"Did you look for any weapon?"

"We did. In fact, we looked all over the room. You see that under the circumstances we thought that Mr. Underwood had killed himself. But we did not find any revolver, though we hunted the library over."

"Who do you mean by we?"

"Williams, Mrs. Underwood, and myself. I think her maid came in after we had entered the room, some time later, but these were all that were in."

"Would you say that there was anything missing from the room?" asked the coroner.

Vance hesitated for some time, replying, "So far as I could see there was nothing disturbed. The papers on the desk had not been touched, and his personal things were all right, though we did not touch his body or look through his clothes. That was done by Mr. Sullivan, after he came, but I was with him and he found that nothing had been taken."

I turned to Bartley to whisper that Vance had not said anything about the \$3,000, but Bartley simply shook his head, so I said nothing. But the fact that he hesitated when asked if anything was missing, and then said nothing about the money, struck me as rather strange. But the next question opened up a new line of evidence, if it could be called evidence, for so far we had nothing that threw any light on the crime.

"Was Mr. Underwood's son in the house at the time you found the body?"

I glanced at the young man before Vance gave the answer. He was ill at ease, and moved nervously in his chair.

"He was not. I know little about his movements, but I think he had left the night before on a yachting trip."

"Now," Mr. Vance, continued the coroner, "I understand that, so far as we can find out, you were the last person that saw Mr. Underwood alive. Will you give

us all the circumstances, tell us just the time, and when it was you saw him."

"As a rule," replied Vance, "it was my duty to assist him with the evening mail. That evening I left him about eight o'clock as he said he wished to work the rest of the evening alone. So I said good-night, and went to my room to read."

"And you never saw him alive again?"

"No, I never saw him alive after that."

"Now," said the coroner, "as far as you know, eight o'clock would be the latest that you knew Mr. Underwood to be alive."

Vance smiled at this, a rather strange sort of a smile; there was a lot in it, and I wondered just what was behind it.

"On the contrary," said Vance, "I do know that he was still alive at least three hours after I left him."

The coroner leaned across the desk, as he shot out the next question.

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this. I came downstairs in the hall about eleven o'clock. I had some letters that I wished to be taken out in the morning mail and went down to leave them on the table from which the postman always took the mail. The library door was closed, but I could hear voices in the room as I passed by, and I was able to distinguish Mr. Underwood's."

I looked at Bartley significantly and saw that he also had noted the discrepancy in the testimony, for Vance had told us that it was ten o'clock when he had heard Robert Underwood talking with his father.

"Were these voices loud?" questioned the coroner.

"The voices were loud, though I was unable to distinguish anything that was said. In fact, I did not try to, or for that matter pause by the door. But I could tell that the persons within the room were quarrelling."

"Could you tell who was talking?"

"Yes, one was Mr. Underwood; the other voice was that of his son."

A startled look came over the faces of the jury, and

involuntarily it seemed as if every one in the room turned to look at young Underwood. He sat gripping the arms of his chair, but keeping his eyes on Vance, who, however, did not glance at him once. There was the faintest trace of a sneer on his lips, though his face flushed as the questioning went on.

" You say that they were quarrelling. What makes you sure of that ? "

Vance smiled again, the same evil smile that I had noticed before.

" Well, their voices were very loud, otherwise I would not have heard them at all because of the surf. Men as a rule do not lift their voices as high as these were unless they are quarrelling. Mr. Underwood was doing most of the talking, and I could tell by the tone that he was angry."

" And you say this was about eleven o'clock ? "

" Yes, sir," came the reply, in positive tones.

The coroner hesitated before he asked the next question.

" Mr. Vance, as Mr. Underwood's private secretary you of course must have been somewhat familiar with his family affairs. Tell us what the relations were that existed between Mr. Underwood and his son. I mean by that, were they on good terms, or was there anything over which they might have quarrelled ? "

Vance did not reply at first, and it seemed as if he was not very eager to speak. In fact, it was not until the coroner had repeated the question again, that he answered :

" I hardly like to answer, sir, but to tell the truth they were not very good. In fact, Mr. Underwood had practically forbidden his son to stay at home, and that was one reason why I was surprised when I heard his voice in the library."

At this, I saw young Underwood half rise from his chair, and for a second I thought he was going to speak, but in a moment he thought better of it and sank down again.

" You say," continued the coroner, " that there was ill

feeling between the two. How far would you say that this feeling had gone ? ”

“ I cannot exactly tell,” answered Vance, “ but I do know that Mr. Underwood had threatened to change his will and to cut off his son. I believe also that he did stop his son’s allowance. Just what caused the ill feeling I do not know, though I do know that his son’s playing at Clark’s had something to do with it. He lost quite a sum of money there this summer.”

At this the coroner turned to the chief of the town police, who was near by and said, “ That’s a gambling house, isn’t it, Francis ? ”

The chief smiled a sheepish smile as he answered, “ I have heard that there is such a place.”

At this several laughed, for Clark’s was known the country over, and the question had been asked more than once why it was that the local police did not close the place.

“ Did Mr. Underwood keep a revolver ? ” was the next question.

“ I do not know,” answered Vance.

“ Do you know if there was a gun in the house ? ”

Again Vance hesitated before his reply was made, and then it was simply to say that he did not know of any, but a second afterwards he changed his reply and said, “ Come to think of it, I believe that Mr. Underwood, that is the son, had a revolver the early part of the summer. I do not know much about it, but I think that he disposed of it. I heard him say he was going to, and have no doubt but what he did.”

It mattered not if Vance intended it or not, but he had given some damaging testimony against the son. He had told that the father and son had quarrelled, and had wound up by saying that the young man had owned a gun. From the expressions on the faces of the jury I knew that they also saw the testimony in the same light that I did. But Vance sat unconcerned, seemingly not realizing what he had said, or that he had injured the young man.

“ Mr. Vance,” asked the coroner, “ do you know of

any reason why any person should desire Mr. Underwood's death, or any reason why he should be killed ? ”

After a moment's silence the answer came, “ I do not.”

The coroner here held a short whispered conversation with the district attorney, and then asked,

“ Did you hear a shot the night Mr. Underwood was killed ? ”

“ No, sir. I doubt if one could have heard one. The surf was pounding very hard on the shore.”

“ Now, one other matter and I am finished. After you left, for I take it you did leave the room to telephone the doctor, who was left in it ? ”

“ No one, sir. Mrs. Underwood said that she understood that the law required everything left as it was found, so we all came out, closing the door, and left it till he came. No one else entered it.”

The next moment the coroner dismissed him and he left the box. His testimony had not proven anything, but it had thrown suspicion upon the young man and had left many things for him to explain. But the case was now getting interesting, and there seemed to be much that had to be cleared up. While I was pondering over it there came a little commotion in the rear of the room. I saw Bartley turn, look back for a moment, and then he leaned over to speak to me.

CHAPTER VIII

A WOMAN ENTERS

WHEN I turned to follow Bartley's gaze, I saw that the woman that had just entered the room was one of the most beautiful that I had ever seen. I did not need his whispered "Mrs. Underwood" to recognize her. I had seen her pictures many times, and for that matter had also seen her when she was upon the stage, in that year before her marriage, when New York was hailing her as the most beautiful show girl of the season.

In truth, for some reason or other, I had not thought of her in connection with the case. If I had given her any thought at all, it was to picture her overcome with grief at the tragedy that had taken place. Yet as I looked at her, though there were slight signs of nervousness, which could be seen if one observed closely, and rather dark circles under her eyes, still there were none of the extreme signs of grief that I expected to see. At least she had not been overcome by the crime. She had not even gone into mourning, for which I think she showed her sense. Her dress was of some light blue silk, that fitted her perfect figure rather closely, and was cut rather low. Her rich clear complexion had a slight tint of colour, but this might have been the result of seeing all eyes turned on her. She was beautiful enough, that there was no doubt of, young, not being at the most over twenty-three and looking about eighteen, but as she leisurely seated herself she certainly did not look like a recently bereaved widow.

Though I had noticed that her French maid was with her, yet I paid her but little attention, but watched the man who closely followed her. He was hard to describe, being that common type seen so often in professional men of all kinds. He was also young, with a rather

cold face, black hair and eyes, and with it all a rather blasé air. He was dressed faultlessly enough, in a striped suit, the only thing that seemed to me out of place being the extra wide black ribbon that fell from his wide-rimmed glasses. He assisted Mrs. Underwood into a chair, and seated himself by her side.

Bartley, noticing that I was looking at him, said simply, "That's Ransome."

Young Underwood did not rise when his step-mother entered, but I saw her flash a smile at him when their eyes met, a smile that he did not return. For a space I wondered how he liked having a step-mother of his own age, but I soon dismissed the thought and turned to look at Williams, the butler, who was now being sworn in.

There was something about the old man that appealed to me. One had but to look at the kindly face, crowned by the white hair, to know that here was an honest man. For many years, I understood that he had been the family butler, first for the dead man's father. Any one could tell that the death of his master had shaken him. His face was sad, and his hand trembled as he took his seat in the chair. While the coroner questioned him, it was necessary to repeat many of them a second time before the old man was able to understand them. And even then it was only after long pauses that he was able to answer, pauses in which he seemed to search for words with which to answer.

He commenced his testimony by telling of the years of service in the family, years that stretched far back to the childhood of the murdered man, and it was plain to see that the relations that existed between the master and servant had been founded on mutual regard and respect. His testimony, or at least the earlier parts of it, in which he told of his service in the family, was of little importance, though he did give one answer that opened up a line that had not been touched upon by any one else. The coroner had asked a simple question which had been misunderstood by the butler, for the old servant answered, "I noticed, sir, that during the spring Mr.

Underwood had seemed to be disturbed by something, worried like."

The coroner was quick to follow it up.

"Explain more fully what you mean? What was it caused you to see any change in his manner?"

"Well, sir," began the old man, "I don't know what it was that caused me to think this. It was not any one thing that made me think he was worried. But I did see a change in him this spring. As a rule the master was a very pleasant man, always cheerful, always smiling, with a word for all the servants. But in April—I think it was—I saw a change. He became rather silent, went about having little to say, and did not smile much. He even spoke rather harshly to me at times, sir, a thing that he had never done in all the years I have been in the family, and I knew that there must be something wrong. But what it was I did not know, though I sometimes thought that it might be that he was a bit worried over business."

The coroner then took up another line of attack.

"Was there any trouble between Mr. Underwood and his son? You have heard Mr. Vance say that Mr. Underwood was very angry at his son, and that they had quarrelled. What do you know about it?"

"There was no trouble that I know of." The tone was so earnest that one could see that the young man was a favourite. "I know that Mr. Robert did not wish to return to college, while his father was determined that he should. But I do not call this trouble, and do not know of any serious trouble."

"And no trouble over gambling?" came the question.

"Why, not what I would call trouble, sir. The young man had played a little, as all do—all gentlemen."

At this, a laugh went round the room, and even the jury unbended and condescended to smile. The room was stilled in a moment, however, as the butler went on:

"Mr. Robert did lose some money, for at breakfast one morning he told his father that he wished some money, because he had lost what he had, at Clark's, and owed a small amount there. But the amount was very

small, sir. The master said, I could not help hearing him, that it was time he acted like a man, and that after that he would give him no more money to play with. But he did say he would pay that bill. But there was not any quarrel, sir, for the master paid the amount, and very little was said. I never heard them quarrelling. Why, the master thought everything of his son, sir, and the boy loved his father."

The coroner did not continue this line of questioning any further, but by his questions brought the old man down to the evening of the crime. The butler testified that Mr. Underwood, after dinner, had gone into the library, having eaten alone, Mrs. Underwood, who had been in New York, had returned during the afternoon, but had not come down to dinner because of a headache. He told of seeing Vance leave the library, sometime about eight o'clock, and of his going upstairs. This left him, the only person, with the exception of Mr. Underwood, that was on the first floor.

The coroner asked, "Did you see any one go into the library, after Vance left?"

"Yes, sir," came the answer. "Robert came in shortly after eight, and went into his father's library. I did not hear any voices, for I was busy with my duties."

"And that was the last time that you saw Mr. Underwood alive?"

"Oh, no, sir. I was in the hall when Mr. Robert left the room, and his father came to the door with him, and spoke to him a moment. He only came to the door of the library, for I let Mr. Robert out myself and then went up to my room. As I passed the library door I could see Mr. Underwood at his desk. He was writing."

"And what time would this be?"

"Shortly after ten; the hall clock struck while I was letting the young man out of the house."

It was only a few moments before that Vance had said he had heard Mr. Underwood and his son quarrelling in the library, and he had fixed the time about eleven. Yet here was the butler swearing that the young man had left the house about ten. Not only saying it was

about ten, but also saying the clock struck that hour as he let the young man out. And these two statements did not agree; both, it seemed, could not be right. If the young man left the house at ten, it could not have been his voice that was heard about eleven by Vance; that is, unless he had returned to the house."

The coroner saw this, for he asked, "Did Mr. Underwood, the son, return to the house?"

"Not that I know of. I came downstairs in a very few moments after I went up to my room, in ten minutes at the most. The library door was closed then."

"Was the outside door, I mean the door that opened into the house, locked?" asked the coroner.

"The outside door was not locked. But there are two, doors. One, the inner door, was fastened with a chain, which was in place when I went to lock it. That was the reason why I came downstairs again, having forgotten to lock the inner door. I locked it and then went up to my room for the night."

"And do you not think any one could have come in while you were upstairs?"

"I doubt it, sir."

"Now," asked the coroner, "you say you came down to lock the inner door. What time was that, and did you hear any voices from the library as you passed the door?"

Williams was silent a moment, a puzzled look coming over his face. After a while he spoke: "It was about eleven o'clock, sir. As for the voices, I am not sure, sir. For a moment I thought I did hear some one, but then later, when I thought of it, I was not sure. You see, I was not trying to listen, and simply went past the door on my way to my room."

"You say for a moment you thought that you heard a voice. Why are you uncertain of this?"

"If I did hear any one speak, sir, it was only the tone of a voice. I could not make out any words. I did not try to."

"If you heard a voice in the room, was anything about it, any tone, something that you could distinguish?"

The answer came quickly. It was easy to see that the butler was not very sure as to his having heard any one speak.

"Oh, no, sir; in fact, it was so indistinct that for a moment I thought——" He paused and left the answer unfinished.

"You thought what?" came the quick question.

Williams again hesitated, speaking at length in a very apologetic tone.

"It was but a fancy, sir, for there was nothing to base it upon, yet it seemed as if——" There came a long pause in which we waited for the answer. Bartley was leaning forward in his chair, the keen, interested look coming into his eyes.

"As if what?" came the impatient question o the coroner.

"As if the voice was a woman's."

It was like a shot, coming in a still room, for the answer was so very unexpected, and the surprise was to be seen on every face. It was the first sensational twist to the inquest. I turned to glance at Mrs. Underwood—others were doing the same thing—and saw her face flush and her lips tremble. She leaned across in her chair to speak to Ransome, who bent his head and smiled as he whispered to her. The next moment she was her composed self. The jury exchanged glances, while the coroner himself looked surprised.

Williams noticed the effect that his answer had caused, and added, "You understand, sir, I cannot swear that it was a woman's voice, but I thought I heard some one speaking, and somehow I got the idea that it was a woman, but I am not sure."

The coroner spent a good deal of time after this in endeavouring to draw from the witness his reasons for thinking that he heard a woman's voice. But all he could get out of Williams was his repeated answer that though he was not certain that he heard any one speak as he passed the library door, yet, if he did, there was something in the tone of the voice that made him think it was a woman's voice. But whose it was he could not say.

Despite all the coroner's efforts to make him answer in a more definite way, he was not able to get any other sort of a reply from him.

He did testify that the next morning when he came down to his work he noticed that the library door was still closed. However, he did not try the door, for it was necessary for him to see that the breakfast was ready. From then on his testimony agreed with that which had been given by Vance.

His complete testimony had thrown little light on the crime, and to me it seemed to leave things in a more unsettled condition than they were before. If he told the truth, and there was no doubt that he had told the truth, then the question as to who was in the room with Mr. Underwood after the son left at ten o'clock was one that would be hard to settle. In fact, it seemed that Vance must have come down after the butler left the hall for the last time.

The coroner now called Mrs. Underwood. She rose and went to the chair, laying her hand on her step-son's shoulder as she passed him. She was pale and nervous, the colour had left her cheeks, and one could tell that what was to follow was distasteful to her. But her beauty shed a radiance over the room, and both the coroner and the jury seemed touched by the wistful, questioning glance that she cast at them. In fact, the coroner apologized for having to question her at all, but stated that the law left him no other course. To this she answered, in a rather low voice, that she doubted if she knew of anything of importance, but that she would try to answer any questions that he might ask, if she was able to do it. As he commenced his questioning, the coroner's voice showed that he stood somewhat in awe of a woman at once so beautiful and at the same time so wealthy.

She told us that before her marriage she had been an actress, and that she had met her husband while playing in New York. She had married Mr. Underwood a little over a year and a half before. Then she came down to the night of the murder. She told us that she had been

in New York for a few days, and that she arrived home that afternoon. She did not see her husband, not coming down to dinner because she had a headache. In fact, she had not seen her husband till she found him dead in the library, for he did not come to her room. I wondered a bit at this, more so when she told us she had been away ten days. Going into details, which were of very little importance, she told of Vance coming and telling her that her husband was not in his room, and of his return a few moments later, excited and fearful over what he had seen through the window. Her voice trembled as she described the breaking in of the door, and when she came to the finding of the body she broke down for a moment and wept. But only for a moment; the next, getting control of herself, she answered, when asked that there was no revolver in the room. Speaking of the windows, she added that she could not say from her own knowledge if they were locked or not, though Vance and Williams both told her later that they were.

"Now, Mrs. Underwood," asked the coroner, "there was not any trouble of any kind between your husband and yourself, was there?"

The question seemed to make her a little angry, for she answered in a heated tone, "Of course not, I do not see why you should ask me such a question?"

The coroner paid no attention to her answer, but asked his next question, asking her something that I had wondered about myself.

"Now, you have said that you returned the afternoon before your husband died, and I understand from your answers that you did not see him at all. Why was this?"

"I had returned from New York. The ride on the train had given me a headache and when I arrived at the house I went at once to my room to rest. I did not feel like going down to dinner, and did not. I did not see Mr. Underwood, though I expected that he would come to my room."

The coroner then changed his form of questioning, by asking her,

"Now, Mrs. Underwood, you heard the butler testify

that he had noticed that Mr. Underwood was worried during the early spring, that he was not himself. Have you noticed the same thing, yourself ? ”

“ I would say not,” came the answer. “ I noticed nothing unusual about his manner. He did not seem worried to me. If he was, it was not shown in his manner to me, though of course I knew absolutely nothing about his various business affairs.”

“ I see,” nodded the coroner. “ And what were the relations that existed between him and his son ? Had there been any trouble of any kind ? ”

For a moment she did not reply, but lowered her eyes and fingered nervously with the lace on her dress, at length asking,

“ Must I answer ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, if I must answer, I will. They were very strained——”

She paused, and then suddenly went on with a rush of words : “ All summer there had been trouble. Of course, after all, it was not over much, nor of very much importance. Mr. Underwood was very angry because Robert had been suspended from college for the year, and insisted that he must go back and finish his course this fall. Robert had the idea that he wanted to take up flying, and said he did not wish to go back to school. Night and day they discussed it, and both were determined to have their own way. Then Robert lost a lot of money gambling, and afterwards his father told him he must stop. But he continued to play, and his father found it out and stopped his allowance. There was rather a bad quarrel over this, from what Mr. Underwood told me——”

The son’s face was a study while she was speaking, flushing a little, but as she went on the look changed to one of wonder.

She continued : “ After the last quarrel Robert went away, and Mr. Underwood, who was very angry when I saw him, said that the boy had not only proven that he was not able to handle money but that he had re-

peatedly broken his word. He added that he would put a stop to it, and that he would change his will. I tried to make him give up this idea, but he insisted that the will would be changed."

The youth's face had contained a look of amazement while she was testifying, but at the last statement it reddened with anger. He half turned to speak to Bartley, but changing his mind sank back again.

"Who told Mr. Underwood that his son was gambling?" asked the coroner.

The woman's face suddenly flushed and she did not answer, and the question had to be put again. It was easy to see that the question was unexpected, and one that she did not wish to answer, but the coroner insisted, and she said at length, "I did; I did not think it was right the way that he treated his father."

The young man smiled at this, a rather bitter smile.

"And how did you find out about it?"

Again she flushed as she answered, "Mr. Ransome told me."

The last three questions had not pleased her, and evidently did not seem to please Ransome, for he twisted back and forth in his chair.

"And who is Mr. Ransome?" asked the coroner.

"Mr. Ransome is a dramatist," came the reply. "Also an actor. He has been working on a play that is to open in a theatre that Mr. Underwood owns."

After this the coroner did not question her much longer, but he did draw from her the statement that she did not know if her husband had changed his will or not. She also said, in answer to the question of Robert's owning a revolver, that she was not sure, but thought that he had at one time during the spring owned one, but she herself had never seen it. Then she added the statement that caused some of us to wonder about it, that she knew very little of what Robert did anyway.

Her testimony, brief as it was, had blackened the character of the son, or at least had added to the case that seemed to be building against him. I noticed that she did not look at him as she passed by his chair. But

there was another thing in it that made me think a little. And that was why it was she had told her husband that the young man had been gambling. Did she wish to estrange the father and son, or did she do it as a matter of duty? And then it seemed that she had been on rather good terms with Ransome.

At this stage the coroner glanced at his watch and stated that as it was noon he would adjourn till after lunch and finish the inquest in the afternoon. He told the jury that they must not talk about the case, and asked the reporters not to talk about it. At this there came the pushing back of chairs, as every one rose to their feet. Mrs. Underwood, without speaking to any one, left the room, with Ransome and her maid. The reporters began questioning Vance and Williams, while the coroner, turning to the district attorney, engaged in an animated conversation with him. Only Robert Underwood was alone, he standing with his hand in his pockets, and a rather sombre look shadowing his young face. Somehow I felt sorry for him.

But Bartley touched my arm, and I followed him over to the large window.

"After lunch, Pelt, I think you better take a car—you can get one in Underwood's garage—and go up to town. First go to the bank and find out if there is any thing in that story Vance tells about the \$3,000 he got after banking hours. I presume it's true, but find out. Then go around to the pawnshops, and the sporting goods stores and see if you can find any trace of that revolver that we found. I cannot say that you will, but you may at that. The gun was several years old, and it may be it was bought in the town. Of course it's a rather remote chance. But look over all their records of sale for several years back. The law, you know, makes them keep a record of the sale of revolvers, with the number of the gun sold, and the name of the person."

I said I would do it, and then asked him what he thought of the inquest. But he only smiled at this, answering, "It's becoming interesting, and there is something back of it all. Maybe we will find out this afternoon."

CHAPTER IX

WHO BOUGHT THE REVOLVER ?

LUNCH turned out to be a rather sombre affair, served in the large dining-room, the coroner, the district attorney and myself having the room to ourselves. Of conversation there was but very little, for the inquest was not mentioned, though it hung like a shadow over us all. Towards the end of the lunch, the district attorney, who turned out to be a local golf player of some note, engaged in some little talk with Bartley over the game. But the interest was rather forced and the conversation soon died out.

Lunch over, after a few words with Bartley I went out to the garage, which was placed at the entrance to the estate by the road that ran up to the house. I found one of the chauffeurs, a young Irishman, smoking at the open door, at ease with all the world. I told him what I wanted, and he with a laugh showed me the seven machines that had belonged to Underwood, and told me to take my pick. I did not care to drive up myself, so he picked out the car he wished and ran it out in the yard. It was a low-hung runabout, clinging close to the ground, of a deep green colour, and built for speed. While the chauffeur was engaged in a hunt for his cap, Bartley came out and gave me the number of the revolver. The chauffeur, who by this time had found his cap, returned, and we climbed up into the car and ran out into the road.

Eastwood was a city of about sixteen thousand, and it was only five miles from the Point. The road ran along the side of the river for a while—a small river, hardly more than forty feet wide—then left it, as the town was approached. The car was a powerful one, and the chauffeur was bound that I should see its merits, so he let it out, and we began to “eat up the road.”

The president of the bank gave only a glance at my

card, and then solemnly ushered me into his private office closing the door, and waving me to a seat. It did not take long for me to explain the purpose of my call.

He was silent a moment, speaking at last in a crisp, concise voice :

" Of course, Mr.—" he consulted the card I had given him—" Mr. Pelt, we consider it an honour to have a man like Mr. Underwood have an account with us. We, in fact, do quite a banking business with the summer people. But Mr. Underwood carried a far larger account with us than most of the people at the Point. I was deeply grieved to hear of his unhappy death. It is very sad," he added impressively. " We have always tried to do what we could to please him. That is the reason why, when he called us up the other day, we said we would be pleased to cash his cheque, though it was after banking hours and against rules. But I will call the cashier, for it was he who gave the money to Mr. Underwood's secretary."

He pushed a button at his side, and when the messenger entered told him to send the cashier in. Glancing again at my card, he added,

" I should say that you might be able to trace the money, for only the day before we received a consignment of bills from Washington, and though we of course do not have the number of the individual bills yet we can easily give you the series number."

At this point the cashier, a rather young looking chap in a blue suit, entered. He was told why we desired him, and said, " Yes, I cashed the cheque as you told me to do. It was for three thousand dollars, and I gave the money to the secretary, in fifty-dollar bills. There were three packages of a thousand dollars each."

" Were the bills old or new ? " I asked.

" They were new bills, never before used. In fact, I can give you the series number if you wish."

I had received the information that I was after, though all that it did was to confirm the story that Vance had told. So I told the cashier that I would like the series number of the bills.

" These," said the cashier upon his return, " are not

the individual numbers that are on the bills. However, you know that new bills are issued by the government with a treasury number, that is so many in a series, and as all we received were in the same series, of course those that I gave Mr. Vance were the same. The number is on this slip of paper."

The details of my afternoon's inquiries at the various stores, in my search for some clue to the revolver, would, I fear, prove to be rather tiresome. Eastwood apparently was a city that had little use for guns of any kind, for by four o'clock, with but one more place to visit, my search had brought to light the sale of but ten revolvers. And those had all been sold to persons within the town, four of them to members of the police, and none of them of the make that I was looking for.

The last store that I entered turned out to be the largest hardware store in the place. Entering, I asked for the manager and sent in my card, with the result of being ushered into his office. After searching the records of sales the fact was brought to light that only four people had bought revolvers from the store in the last year. And those were all residents of the city, and these also had not bought the make of the gun I was looking for. Making up my mind that further search was useless, I was about to leave, when he said, " You might like to speak to the clerk that has charge of the gun department. I do not think he can aid you any, but it won't hurt to speak to him."

Doubting the value of the suggestion I, however, agreed to it, and waited for the clerk to appear. He turned out to be the typical young clerk, with a most gaudy tie, and a sport shirt that was made to be seen. When the manager introduced me, and added that I was with Bartley, whom he called the well-known criminal investigator, the clerk's face became all attention. The record had shown no sales of Savage guns of any kind, and I thought it was rather useless to ask him anything about them. Hardly knowing what else to say, I ventured, " Have you ever carried in stock the Savage guns ? "

To my surprise he nodded, "We carry their shot-guns, and a rifle or two. Their revolvers we did sell, but don't any longer. It's a rather expensive gun, and we found that the fellows did not care to spend the money, wanted something cheaper. I did have, however, several in stock, but sold the last one several months ago."

This rather astonished me, for there had been no record of a gun of that make being sold. I said as much to the clerk. He turned to the manager.

"It's not on the book, sir, and that is my fault, but I did not know how to enter it. It was while you were on your buying trip I got a call on the 'phone one afternoon. It was a long-distance call, and I waited some time in the booth before I got it. A man wanted to know if we had any automatic revolvers. I saw a chance to get rid of a good gun, and told him I had a Savage, and quoted the price. He asked me to set it aside, and said he would call for it. I, of course, did what he asked."

"But why did you not enter his name in the book when you sold it?" asked the manager.

The boy threw out his arms in an expressive gesture.

"How in the devil could I? He never came for it. About four o'clock, who should come in but Jimmy Ryan." He turned to me. "We have a poor messenger service in the town with two messenger boys. Ryan is one of them, a little red-headed devil of an Irish boy. Well, Jimmy came in and said he had come for a package that I had received a 'phone call about, and laid the money down on the counter. I wrapped up the gun and gave it to him. After he went out, I remembered that I hadn't the name of the man that bought it, and remembered the new law. I could not enter the sale in the kid's name, and I did not dare enter it in the record, with the name of the buyer blank. So I simply took a chance that no one would ever know anything about it, and let it go at that."

The manager, looking a bit disgusted, growled out: "It was a foolish thing to do. You might have caused us to lose our licence."

I was doing some rather rapid thinking. Apparently I had found something after all. I had discovered the sale of the only Savage automatic revolver that had been sold in the town for a year past. But this fact, by itself, did not mean much ; there was much more to learn. So I tried another question :

" You don't know, of course, where the 'phone call came from ? "

The boy grinned. " Certainly I do. It was from the Point. I know the girl, the operator, pretty well, and joked her a bit while I was waiting for the connection."

I was rather startled at this, though it was another vague fact. But some one had bought a Savage, and Bartley insisted that it was that kind of a gun with which Underwood had been shot. And again the call came from the Point, and whoever had bought the gun, apparently did not care to become known. The sending in of the messenger boy for the gun seemed to prove that.

" Do you remember the date of the sale ? " I asked.

" Yes, it was the first Saturday in May. I remember because I had an appointment that night, and not finding who I sold that gun to got me irritated, and rather spoiled the fun I was having."

" How about the number ? "

" Don't know it. But if I ever saw that gun again I would recognize it. The good Lord knows I should know it as well as I know my grandmother ; in fact better, for I saw it oftener."

Thanking them, I went out to the car, where the chauffeur was waiting, with a bored expression on his face. I asked him to drive me to the city messenger service.

There, seated upon a bare bench, reading a gaudy-covered paper novel, was a boy. One glance at his red hair and the unmistakable Irish face told me it was the boy that the clerk had spoken of. I went to his side, and, as he turned to look at me, asked, " Want to earn a dollar ? "

The novel slid to the floor and the answer was emphatic, " Rather, try me."

"Well," I continued, "do you remember about two or three months ago going into Woodard's store for a package? You had to pay for the package before they gave it to you at the gun counter. Then I think you took it to a man."

The boy grinned, and answered back at once, "O' course I remember it; the bloke gave me a dollar."

"Well, if you tell me all about it, I will give you another one."

He laughed. "That's easy. Hand it over. I was passing this way that day, when down in front of the post office a fellow in front of a big automobile asked me if I wanted to make a little change. So he gave me some money and told me to go to Woodard's, and go to the gun counter and ask for the gun the fellow had 'phoned about. So I went and got it, and he gave me a dollar."

"Can you describe the man that sent you?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Not very well. He was by a great big car, a tall chap, with an automobile coat on, and wearing great big goggles, so I did not see his face very well."

I gave the boy his dollar, and was turning to go when another thought struck me, and I asked,

"Have you ever seen the car he was in, since then? I mean up here in the town."

He thought a moment. "I can't remember. But if I ever did see the car, I could remember it."

Taking my card from my pocket, I wrote on it the number of Underwood's 'phone, and gave it to him, saying, "If you ever see that car again on the street, call up the number on this card, and ask for me, or Mr. Bartley. If you do that, there is a ten-dollar bill in it for you. Can you remember?"

"I understand," was his reply. Then for the first time he glanced at the card in his hand. His eyes grew big with wonder as he looked, and in an awed voice he asked, "Are you a detective?"

I nodded back an assent. For a moment the boy stood first looking at the card and then at myself, his face flushing. Then came an admiring, "You bet your life I

will look for that car. Leave it to me, and if I find it I will let you know at once."

As I reached the street the boys were calling out the evening papers, and as I reached the car I hailed the first one I saw. Without waiting to enter the machine I opened the paper. Blazoned in heavy, black type, that ran across the first page, were the words :

"CORONER'S JURY BRINGS IN VERDICT IN UNDERWOOD
MYSTERY
MURDER AT THE HANDS OF PERSON OR PERSONS UNKNOWN
DAMAGING EVIDENCE AGAINST DEAD MAN'S SON
ARREST EXPECTED WITHIN A FEW HOURS"

Unheeding the passing crowd, I began reading the column under the heavy type. For a while I stood holding the paper in my hand. The verdict did not surprise me. I had hardly expected any other. But the statement that an arrest was to be made could only refer to young Underwood. I decided that I would read the rest of the testimony in the car, while on the way back to the Point.

As I read the account of the young man's testimony, I judged that he must have had a very uncomfortable hour. They had forced him to admit that his father, to say the least, had been rather angry with him, and that he himself had passed the week before his father's death with a friend, returning to the house only a few hours before his father's death. He said it was true that his allowance had been stopped, and that the day before the murder he had been without money. The admission was made that the trouble was over both his being expelled from college and the fact that he had been gambling. He said it was true that about eleven on the night his father was killed, he had been seen gambling in Clark's and that he had plenty of money. But he denied that the trouble with his father was serious enough to be called much of a quarrel or that his father had driven him from the house. Moreover, he insisted, and the coroner was not able to shake him in this, that

on the night of the murder his father had given him five hundred dollars, and that he had left the house about ten and did not return. He said also that his father did not tell him he expected some one in, and did not say that any one was coming.

This seemed to be the gist of his testimony, in itself not so very damaging, yet in connection with what others had testified I could see how bad some of his statements must have seemed to those that heard the testimony. I let the paper fall to the floor of the car, and then, as if reading my thoughts, came the chauffeur's voice,

"They will never make me think that young man killed his father. He is too good a chap for that, as nice a boy as you wish to know, a bit of a sport, that's all, but nothing wrong about him. He never killed the old man. You don't think so yourself, do you ? "

I shook my head with a weary air. "I don't know."

There came a silence after this, the chauffeur evidently not liking my answer.

As we neared the Point, we ran into a fog. Not one of those soft, grey, opaque things that poets speak of, but a wet, dense mist that clung to the ground, and trickled through your clothes till they clung to you like wet paper. It made driving very difficult, and we had to crawl along at slow pace. By the time we reached the house the mist had become so thick we could hardly see the front of our car. As I ran up the steps, I could hear the heavy crash of the surf on the shore. It was going to be a bad night, and a storm was coming in from sea. It was almost time for dinner, and my clothes being wet I hurried to my room to change them. I found Bartley in, reading a paper. He glanced up with a smile,

"Well ? "

In a few words I told him of my afternoon, his face expressing no surprise. When I had finished he simply said, "Good work, Pelt. We will go over it after dinner. Better change your clothes and I will wait and go down with you."

While I was dressing, after a hasty shower, he came to the door and drawled out, "Know the verdict ? "

I nodded.

He continued, "I understand that two or three of them wanted to bring in a charge against Robert Underwood, but the foreman had sense enough to persuade them not to do it. Still, I would not be surprised if within a day or so the local police arrest him. They will allow him to go down with the body to New York, on his promise to return here the next day."

I glanced at him, trying to discover what he thought about it, but it was impossible to tell from Bartley's face what he thought. Some time later, while we were on the stairs on our way to dinner, he paused and turned to me.

"We will be the only ones at dinner this evening, with the exception of Mr. Phelps, who was, as you must know, Mr. Underwood's lawyer. He has just arrived from Maine, where he has been at his camp. He came to take charge of the estate. All he knows about the case is what he has read in the papers, and that's mighty little. We are not to discuss the affair till after dinner, so not a word about it while we are at the table."

CHAPTER X

WHY DO MEN DREAM ?

THOUGH I had never met Morton Phelps, yet I was very familiar with his career. Doubtless there were few lawyers his superior at the bar, and as an adviser of great corporations in the various intricacies of the law, he had few, if any, equals. It was generally known that he had been Underwood's personal counsel for years, and that they were old friends from boyhood days.

Familiar with his picture, I recognized him as soon as we entered the room. He was seated at the table, but rose to greet Bartley, whom he knew, and who introduced me. Phelps was a man between fifty or sixty, of medium height and build. The close-shaven face was one of power, surmounted by a mass of steel grey hair. His fondness for jewels, particularly his hobby for rubies, was well known, and as we seated ourselves at the table I observed on his fingers several rings with really very remarkable stones.

We did not linger overlong at dinner, nor did we talk very much. When the meal came to a close we went into the smoking-room. The night was damp, and a bit cool for the time of the year, and the rain, which had just started, was driving against the windows. The butler had started a log fire in the fireplace, and the chairs were drawn around it. On a stand near at hand were cigars and cigarettes.

We all chose cigars, Phelps saying, with a laugh, that he was afraid that they might be too heavy for him, but that he had forgotten to bring his own. When Williams left the room we seated ourselves around the fire. Phelps lighted his cigar and turned to Bartley, his face becoming grave. For a while he did not speak, and the only sound was the surf crashing on the shore below and the rain dashing against the windows.

"I need not tell you, Mr. Bartley," he said at last, "what a shock it was to me when I heard of Mr. Underwood's unhappy death. You know, of course, that we had been friends for years, a friendship that commenced about the time we both came to New York, both poor boys from the farm, and both absolutely unknown. For years I have been his personal lawyer, and I presume I know as much about his affairs as any living man. I was on my way to my camp, in fact, was just entering the woods, when I learned of his death from a Portland paper. It seemed almost incredible to me that he was murdered. For John was a friendly soul, and so far as I know did not have a single enemy. I myself never saw him angry, and cannot conceive why any one should want to kill him."

Bartley, who had been examining the tip of his cigar while Phelps was speaking, replied,

"Mr. Phelps, you probably knew Underwood better than any one else. You say that he was a man that was always in the best of spirits ; in fact, that is what every one that knew him says. But I have heard that during the past few months those that saw him noticed a change in him. You must have seen it, if such was the case."

The lawyer looked at the fire for several moments, and replied thoughtfully,

"Now that you mention it, I think I did. He seemed at times less carefree, rather disturbed. I thought it might be because of his health, or business, though his affairs were going nicely. The last time that I saw him, it was in my office. He said he was not sleeping well, and we laughed over a dream that he had several times.

Bartley interrupted, asking rather eagerly about the dream.

The lawyer threw back his head and laughed. "Come, Mr. Bartley, you don't mean to tell me that you believe in dreams ?"

"There is a literature to-day," replied Bartley, smiling, "that is seriously taking up the study of dreams, or, better say, the science of dreams. Of course, thousands of dream books have been written by the simple, and

millions have read them. But it is only within the past few years that science has said that these people were right to the extent that dreams do have a meaning. This new psychological technique, by which dreams may be 'understood,' does not attach importance to the dream itself, but to another thing that is back of the dream. The scientific formula is that a dream is 'the disguised fulfilment of a repressed wish.' Thus from a dream you may sometimes gain an inkling into the secret thoughts; and the hidden things of a man's life may be brought to light. Therefore, I hope I do not seem superstitious if I seem seriously interested in any dream that Underwood may have had."

Phelps had listened to Bartley's remarks with so much interest that he had allowed his cigar to go out. He struck a match to relight it, before he spoke.

"I have seen something regarding what you have said, but I confess that I never took to it seriously. I must read up on the subject. That dream of Underwood's was an odd one. And he said he had dreamed the same thing, or about the same thing a number of times. It started always about the same way. He was in a great field, and at his feet was a flower, the odd thing about it was that it was the only one in the field, snow white. He admired it, and then suddenly it began to change its colour, grew darker, and the sky, which had been bright and clear, became overcast. While he looked, the flower changed into a great tree, unkempt and wild, decayed, overrun with vines that entangled his feet. He endeavoured to escape, when suddenly, to his horror, he saw the tree falling, and he knew that it would destroy him, that he was not able to escape. He woke up at this point. That was the dream he told me of, the day he was in my office. But he said that the strange thing was that he had the same dream before, only the first two times he dreamed it, there was no tree, only a great snake that tried to destroy the flower, and which he in turn tried to kill with an axe."

Bartley, who had been engaged in writing Phelps's account of the dream in his notebook, said, as he placed

the book in his pocket, that it might be that he would be able to find something in it.

The lawyer now rose from his chair and took several turns around the table and across the room before he reseated himself. Turning to Bartley, he said, "Now, Mr. Bartley, I only know about this affair from the accounts in the papers. I wish that you would give me any other facts you may have."

Bartley lighted a fresh cigar, and commenced. In a few words, yet with an art that made you see clearly the picture, he told of the finding of Underwood's body. From that he went into detail, telling what was found in the room, and the facts that had been brought out from the various people in the house. He told of finding Robert Underwood asleep in his room, and of the testimony given by the witnesses of the feeling that existed between the son and the father. The story took some time, for Bartley left no fact hidden, and the lawyer, who was much interested, was given all the facts. When it was over, Phelps stated with the same judicial tone that a judge might use in court, "Then I take it, we are sure that he was murdered ? "

Bartley's answer was emphatic.

"Absolutely. The murderer slipped up on one thing. The fact is that they always do. If the revolver had been left in the room, there would have been no way on earth of being sure that Underwood had not killed himself. But there was no gun in the room. If the door and windows had not been locked, and the revolver had been found, then every one would have said suicide. But there was no gun there. I think from what the doctor said and other things that Underwood was shot about eleven o'clock and while he was smoking."

The lawyer nodded, and then with a quick glance shot the question,

"And who killed him ? "

There was a slight smile on Bartley's face as he answered,

"That remains to be seen. Many people will say that the evidence brought out at to-day's inquest seemed to

point to the dead man's son. In fact, I have little doubt that within a day or so the district attorney will place him under arrest. Of course, it's all circumstantial evidence. But in this case there is nothing else, and even little of that, but it all seems to point to the boy."

Phelps, who had sunk down in the chair and was gazing at the fire, commented darkly, "Sometimes the circumstances form the best kind of evidence. But what will they say was the motive for the murder?"

"That," said Bartley, "is the great problem. If I take the viewpoint against the young man, the one that Pelt and others took, and the same that the coroner thinks was proven at the inquest, it would be money. They will say the young man needed money, that he asked his father for it, and was refused. They will no doubt say that he saw the three thousand dollars that Underwood had and killed him for that. The money is missing, you know, and that night he was seen playing at Clark's, and had all the money that he needed."

The lawyer straightened up in his chair and brought his fist down on its arm. "Bosh," he said. "Bosh. The young cub could very easily have borrowed all the money that he wished. If I were defending him, I think that I would not find it very hard to demolish that argument. That is a weak point upon which to accuse him of the murder of his father."

"Yes," said Bartley, "that is true; it is a rather weak point, but it does not stand alone, you know. Mrs. Underwood said that her husband told her he was going to change his will, and cut off his son."

"Going to change his will?" echoed Phelps in a very surprised voice, and, turning, his face expressed the greatest astonishment.

"Yes," answered Bartley. "And there is more yet. There was found among Underwood's papers the sheet that I will show you, addressed to you. The fact was not told the jury, both the coroner and the district attorney did not think it amounted to anything, but on it were the words, 'I am tired of the whole business and will change my will, that will bring h——'; and the question is,

Does that 'h' stand for 'him'? The letter was never finished, though there is no doubt that it was in Mr. Underwood's handwriting."

The lawyer rose to his feet in the greatest surprise. In an astonished tone he asked, "What does it mean?"

"Well," replied Bartley, "the district attorney, who seems to have a theory for everything, says that it stands, that is the letter 'h,' for 'him,' inferring the son."

Phelps, whose cigar had gone out a second time, nervously relighted it, and drawing his chair close to ours began,

"I know nothing about Underwood's plan to change his will, for, of course, it stands to reason that I should have known if he was going to do that. I have been his lawyer for years. In fact, I drew up his will, and there is no secret in the fact that he named me executor of his estate."

Bartley ventured, "I presume the estate is a very large one."

"Yes, it is very large. No one can tell just how much it amounts to. He owns valuable property in New York and Chicago, several theatres, and, of course, the Underwood building. The real estate holdings must run well over ten million, and when you add his stocks and bonds, railroad holdings and the like, I should say that it must amount to over thirty million."

Bartley glanced at him before he asked the next question,

"Of course you are familiar with the terms of the will?"

"Naturally," observed Phelps, "I ought to be. I drew it up. I presume that I better tell you how it stood, Mr. Bartley. You are engaged in the affair, and it will soon be public property. He left quite a large amount to charity. Mrs. Underwood receives in lieu of dower, giving up her dower rights, the house in the city. With the exception of the library, which is a famous one, all the personal things go to her, the books and pictures in the library going to the son. She receives also several hundred thousand dollars in money, and

the interest from a fund of \$4,000,000 invested in bonds. The bulk of the estate, with the exception of gifts to servants and a few friends, go to the son, he to receive a yearly income till he is twenty-seven, and after that the principal."

"I presume," said Bartley, "that you are to take charge of the estate?"

"Oh, yes. Robert Underwood saw me when I arrived, and as he knew that I was named as executor in the will he asked me to take entire charge of things. Later, Mrs. Underwood asked the same thing, though I don't think she ever had an extra warm feeling for me. You see," he continued, with a smile, "she found out that I told John he might be making a mistake in marrying her. Oh—I don't mean there is anything against her, but she was very young, too young for him, and not the type for a man of his position. But I am in charge now, and as I am more familiar with his affairs than any one else, I am glad to help him. I am his personal counsel, you know."

"But where is the will?" asked Bartley.

"In the safe in my office," replied Phelps. "You see, I came here directly from my camp in Maine—naturally I wouldn't have it with me."

"Has it occurred to you that, considering what his wife says, Underwood might have made a new will here recently, that would, with a later date, supplant the one you have?"

The lawyer gave a sudden start, a curious look coming into his face. He gave a quick, searching glance at Bartley.

"I see," he said; "it would be a good idea if we looked immediately into the papers in his safe."

"The safe is locked," replied Bartley. "Nobody seems to know if it was locked when they found Underwood or not. But when the district attorney came it was locked. It may be that Vance knows the combination." He was out into the hall, searching for Williams.

Phelps turned to me. "Do you know, Mr. Pelt, that the more I hear of this affair, the more I am puzzled. I knew Underwood well, and can't for the life of me

see why any one should wish to kill him. I am glad Bartley is handling the case for the son, there is no one better, and if he cannot solve it, then no one can. But, for myself, I don't see any light in it at all."

I had started to speak, when Bartley entered, followed by Vance. The secretary was dressed as if he had been on the point of going out, though why any one should wish to go out in a storm such as we were having was more than I could see. He seemed a bit excited, and as usual nervous. From behind his heavy glasses his eyes took us all in sharply. As he stood waiting for some one to tell him why he was wanted, I suddenly discovered that I had taken a violent dislike to him, but for what reason I could not tell.

"Mr. Vance," said Bartley. "Mr. Phelps and I wish to get into this safe. Do you know the combination?"

"No," came the answer. "Mr. Underwood always closed the safe, and never told me the combination."

Bartley turned to Phelps, saying, "We better go and have a look at it."

We rose and followed him from the room, Phelps and I a little behind the other two. At the library door Bartley paused for us, while Vance went up the stairs. Phelps turned to me and said, as Vance went away, "Do you know, I have never fancied that chap, though Underwood told me he was the best secretary that he ever had."

I was somewhat surprised to hear expressed in words the very thing that had been in my thoughts a moment or so before. But I said nothing and followed Phelps into the room. He had not been in it, and as the lights flared up, and he saw the desk at which his friend had been killed, I could see that he was deeply moved.

"I have been wanting to get into that safe," said Bartley, "ever since I took this case. But until you came, Mr. Phelps, there was no one who seemed to have authority to have it opened."

"But it is closed," said Phelps. "How will you get in it, unless you have an expert from New York, and that means a delay of twenty-four hours."

Bartley stood for a moment, gazing at the safe.

"That safe was found closed the morning of the murder. Yet, strange to say, on Underwood's desk we found no business papers of importance. In a sense it would look as if he closed it himself. Yet, on the other hand, if he was working at his desk up to the moment he was killed, then he had no time to close it. The other alternative is that some one else must have closed it. I think that the person who hit Pelt here, last night, was interested in the safe." He paused a moment, then continued, "But you spoke about an expert to open the safe."

He took off his coat, laying it on a chair, and rolled back the sleeves of his silk shirt. Going to the safe, he knelt and turned the combination lock several times. Then he turned to Phelps.

"There is hardly a safe made, if there is one made, that cannot be opened, if one has time enough. The simpler the safe, and the older it is, the easier it is to get into it. Now, though I am not what you might call an expert, yet I think I can open this safe. I know a fellow now in the Tombs prison who could get into it in two minutes."

He bent his ear to the safe, and with the tips of his fingers began to turn very slowly the figured dial. Slowly he turned it to right, then to the left, pausing at each turn to listen. Though Phelps and myself crowded behind him, yet all we could see was the turning of the dial. He worked for about ten minutes, then gave the knob a turn and a pull, but nothing happened. "I will have to try again," he said cheerfully. Once more he bent over the dial, turning it carefully, and listening as before. In a short time he rose to his feet, saying, "I think I have it this time. You see, the whole thing is more in the deftness of the touch than in anything else." Bending down he turned the knob again, and gave it a pull. Slowly the door of the safe swung open.

CHAPTER XI

FIGURES IN A RED BOOK

THE inner door, a thin sheet of steel, was locked, but the key was in place, and it took only a second to open it. The interior of the safe, which was almost four feet high, was divided into two parts, one that contained a number of ledgers and account books. The other half had three drawers, and filled the lower half. Taking the first of these from its place, Phelps carried it over to the desk.

The contents of the drawer consisted of various business papers. Among them were deeds, insurance policies, and a sheaf of stock certificates. Phelps, as befitted his position of administrator of the estate, took charge of the search. Picking up each paper and envelope, he glanced at it, and then handed those that might seem of interest to Bartley. When the first drawer had been finished, Phelps carried it back to the safe and brought back the second, which he went through in a similar fashion. When he brought out the third drawer he turned its contents out upon the desk. Among the papers in this drawer were a number of bank books and some cancelled cheques. The bank books showed that Underwood had on deposit in various banks a very large sum of money, and Phelps took charge of these. Bartley glanced the cheques over, but evidently found nothing that interested him. The drawer also contained a number of miscellaneous articles, including several pieces of jewellery, several watches, studs, and a ring or two. There were several bundles of letters, which turned out to be only business correspondence. The other things, among which was a little red-covered notebook, were apparently of little value. Phelps swept all the things back into the drawer and turned to Bartley. "There's nothing here."

"No, there is no will here," said Bartley, "and nothing in reference to one."

As he made this remark Bartley had picked up the small red notebook and now stood turning the pages in a listless way. With a page half turned, I saw him pause as he was about to turn it over, and look carefully at it. Then he slowly turned the other leaves, spending some little time with each. At length he placed the small book in his pocket, and turned to Phelps.

"I would like, Mr. Phelps, to look over in my leisure the bank books and the cancelled cheques, also the slips that show withdrawals from the bank. I'll return them to you in the morning. The other thing you can replace in the safe."

The bank books were in Phelps' pocket, and picking up the cancelled cheques from the table, he handed them to Bartley.

With the exception of the bank books and the cheques, Phelps then placed everything back in the safe. Bartley then locked it, and gave the combination to Phelps.

For a few moments we kept up a general talk, but the lawyer, whose trip from Maine had been a long one, was weary, and after a long yawn, frankly excused himself to go to bed. When we were alone, Bartley threw out his arms, yawned a moment, and said, "Pelt, get your rain coat, and we will take a walk. I have been in the house all day."

I went to our rooms for the coats, returning at once. Telling Williams, who was in the hall, that we would return in a little while, we went out into the night. The rain seemed over, though the fog was as dense as ever. Like a thick, soft grey blanket it covered all things, and we found after we were on the beach that we could not make out the house. The wind had died away, though a slight breeze was blowing in from the sea. Carefully, hardly being able to see two steps in front of us, we picked our way down the long stone stairs to the shore. The sand under our feet was soft and wet. We turned and walked towards the Point, keeping high upon the beach, where the sand was hard and firm.

I never like the seashore when it rains, there is something about it that is gloomy and depressing. I said as much to Bartley.

"Yes," he said, "it's a bad night; a poor one for the party that Mrs. Severance is giving to-night, to the Italian ambassador."

We walked slowly towards the Point, following the long curve of the shore. Again, but in far more detail, I told Bartley of my trip to the city during the afternoon. When I had finished, he said,

"You will have to take that gun up and let the clerk have a look at it. There may be something in it, for there is no doubt that whoever bought it did not wish to be known. That sending of the messenger boy after it shows that he knew the law regarding the getting the names of those that bought revolvers. You might even be able to get trace of the 'phone call. If it did come from the Point it could be traced. They keep all the slips as records of long-distance calls, and I think they have to pay an extra ten cents to call up from here. It was in May, you said, and there are few places open then, and none of the hotels. I think that you may find where it came from."

We walked a little further, and had started to retrace our steps, when Bartley suddenly touched my arm, saying, "Listen!"

For a moment I could hear but the sound of the surf on the shore, then above the sound of the sea I heard the patter of feet, the sound of some one running rapidly, and coming towards us from the Point. The sound became louder, the sound of feet slapping on the wet sand as of one running in great haste. In a moment there flashed into view a man running with his head down. He was below us, nearer the water, and because of the fog nothing could be seen as to his features. A second later we heard him stumble, no doubt over a stone hidden in the sand, and he must have fallen for we heard the splash of water, but if he did he was up in a minute, and we heard the running steps die away as he continued on his way down the sand. I turned in amazement to Bartley.

"What in the devil would you call that?"

He chuckled. "He certainly was in a hurry. And a man that runs at the speed he was going on a beach a night like this has some reason for it. He ran like a man that was trying to get away from something, as if he was afraid of some one behind him."

I half expected to see some one else rush out of the fog after the man, but though we waited no one appeared, and talking it over we walked back to the house.

After we reached our rooms I started to get ready to retire. In my night garments I went back and found Bartley at his desk. He had thrown aside his coat and had put on his blue-velvet smoking jacket. He was engaged in looking through a great stack of cheques, and as I entered was just picking up the red notebook that had been in the safe. Tapping it with his finger, he turned to me to say,

"Pelt, I find a rather odd thing in this book. You see, Underwood used this book evidently to set down his own personal expenses. He was a methodical sort of chap, not close, but, like most rich men, he knew where all his money went. On the third page of this book, marked 'paid out,' and after that the word 'personal,' I found this."

I bent over his shoulder and looked at the page; it contained the following in a list that extended down the page :

April 10,	\$3,000
May 6th,	\$4,000
June 10,	\$3,500
August 3,	\$3,000

The last date was the day of the murder.

"It was that last date," said Bartley, "that made me put this book in my pocket when we were down in the library a while ago. Moreover, \$3,000 was the sum that Vance got from the bank. The sums total \$13,500. Now, looking through these cancelled cheques, which cover these dates, I do not find any for these amounts, though there are in each case smaller cheques drawn on the same days. It looks queer, as if Underwood did not

care to have it known what he was doing with the money."

"Maybe," I suggested, "he destroyed the cheques."

"But suppose he did," Bartley answered, "the very same reasoning applies. If he destroyed them, it was because he did not wish them traced. When a man like Underwood, who keeps account even of his cigar money, pays out \$13,500 and does not even say what it was for in a book that tells all his other expenditures, it looks as if he did not wish it known. The payments, I would say, were in cash, and the cheques were destroyed. What do you think of it?"

"Blackmail," I suggested.

"It does look like it," he ventured, "though a man of his position should not be afraid of that. It's tried on all rich men; they are used to it. But he was paying out a large sum of money to some one each month, and it seems that he did not care to have it known to whom he was paying it or for what. It fits into the account of his being worried, maybe this might tell why, if we knew what this money was used for. We have come far enough to see that Underwood was at least trying to keep something concealed, and when we find out what it was, we will have gone a long way towards explaining the rest."

He paused, flicking the ash of his cigar.

"Pelt, we have not made much progress in this case so far, but back of it all there is something big, bigger than we think. I can feel it; it's vague yet, but it's there—a reason for all that has taken place, something really important. And when we find out what it is, it will startle us, and solve the mystery."

It was some time later, after I had gone to my room to sleep, that Bartley called to me.

"By the way, Pelt, dismiss the idea that Underwood gave his son any of the money that he received from the bank. I called up Clark's, and he told me that the fifty-dollar bills that the young man played with were old money, not new. They remembered it, because one of them was so old that the dealer tore it."

And with that fact to ponder with, I went to bed.

CHAPTER XII

IT WAS JOHN UNDERWOOD'S CAR

I OVERSLEPT myself the next morning, and it was late when I got down to breakfast, finding the dining-room deserted, the butler informing me that Bartley had eaten his breakfast over an hour earlier.

It was a beautiful morning after the storm. The sky was clear, only a few white clouds breaking its blue expanse, the surf had died away during the night, and the sea lay, its surface untouched even by the slightest breeze.

My breakfast over, I went out on the great verandah that ran around the house, searching for Bartley. I found him seated in a chair, smoking a cigar and reading a morning paper. As I greeted him, I noticed with some little surprise that he was dressed as if for church. For a moment I wondered why he was dressed with so much care, and then I remembered that it was the morning of the funeral. Because of the notoriety that had risen over his death, the family had decided to have the funeral private, and to hold it at the shore, and then take the body to New York. Only a very few of his closest friends had been invited. Bartley, throwing down the paper as I pulled the chair I had chosen to his side, said,

"Seen the paper?"

"Anything in it about the murder?" was my inquiry. I took it.

"Not much, but there is very little in the papers. The labour troubles are driving everything else out. What little there is makes a good deal about the quarrels that Underwood and his son had and plays them up, saying that the young man will no doubt be arrested in a few days. Several of the papers think that there is not much evidence against the boy, but, of course, the yellow

sheet is delighted to have such a scandal break and plays it up. The truth is that the papers are not able to say much about the case, for the reason that they know little about it. Nobody does."

He would have said more, but at this moment who should come up to us but Vance. He was not wearing his glasses, and for the first time I saw his eyes clearly. They were rather large and with a look of keen aggressiveness. As he came near where we were seated, Bartley called him.

"Oh, Vance, I was down on the shore this morning, and at the water's edge I picked this up. I thought it looked like yours."

As he spoke he extended the palm of his hand and in it lay a pair of glasses which I recognized as the ones that I had seen Vance wear.

The secretary's face flushed and he seemed embarrassed, but he reached for the glasses and examined them carefully.

"Yes," he said, hesitating a little, "they are mine. I do not understand how they happened to be on the beach, for I lost them last night out on the platform in front of the house and because of the fog was unable to find them."

"Maybe," suggested Bartley, "the wind blew them down to the shore."

Vance said nothing to this and seemed eager to get away, soon leaving us. As soon as he was out of hearing, Bartley said :

"I wonder why he lied to us about his glasses ? He never lost them on the platform, and, of course, no wind like we had last night could have blown them down to the beach. I thought last night I recognized Vance in the man that ran past us. Williams said he came in a few minutes before we did. So I later went down to the place where we had seen him fall. There I found his glasses. I don't care much about his reason for being in such haste, or for knowing where he was. Still, I wish I knew why he lied to us."

For a while nothing more was said. Idly we sat

looking out at the sea. After the storm the air was clear, and twenty miles away I could see Block Island, with its sand cliffs yellow in the morning sun. I was watching a flock of gulls engaged in following a school of fish, whose course I could trace by the ripple on the water, when Bartley turned to me.

" You will have a good deal to do to-day, Pelt. I am going down to New York after the funeral, and will try to get back some time to-morrow. I will give you a list of things that I wish done, and you will find that they will keep you busy. After you finish them, take things easy, and keep your eyes open."

At this moment Williams came silently from the house to tell us that some one wanted Bartley on the telephone. With a look of surprise he rose and went to the house. It was some little time before he returned, and I passed it in glancing through the paper that he had thrown by his chair. I flung it aside as Bartley appeared, dropping with a little laugh into his chair.

" Do you know, Pelt," he said, " I had the idea that we came down here for a rest, and yet here we are, engaged in the most puzzling case that we have ever had. You remember yesterday some one called me about a robbery case. Well, last night they had another one at Mrs. Severance's. You remember I told you that she gave a dinner and a dance last night, a rather select affair, to the Italian ambassador. But anyway, some one got away with some of her jewels and a case that belonged to the ambassador. She wanted me to come over and see if I could discover anything, and I told her that I would be unable to do so, but would send you over. Now we cannot bother with any more cases; this one will take all our time. So I want you to let her down easy, but refuse to take it."

So for a while we talked of the robberies. But the hour of the funeral was at hand, and we strolled into the house.

The large drawing-room was half filled when we entered. We took a seat near the door, a little way from the people, where one could see very clearly all that

went on. Though the funeral was private, yet I recognized in the front row of chairs a number of business men from the city, and among them three who were among the leading figures in the world of finance, dressed simply in grey or black. The family was not down, though the servants were in their places.

Though it was a clear, bright day, yet the room was dark, the blinds being closed, and the air was warm and rather close. The electric dome over our heads cast a soft light over a part of the room, leaving in the corners great blotches of shadows and darkness. By the window with the closed blinds stood the heavy casket, a massive thing in mahogany, and to my surprise there was not a single flower in the room. For a while I mused over the sadness of such a death, taking away one in the very prime of life, who seemingly had everything to live for. But my thoughts were ended by the appearance of the family. There were four in the party. The clergyman walked with Mrs. Underwood, who, slightly pale, leaned on his arm. Behind them came the son, walking with a weary step, and by his side, dressed in a dark grey suit, his rather handsome face set in a sombre expression, was Ransome. The sight of Ransome set me wondering how it was he should come in with the family. Evidently he was a great friend of the dead man's wife. The son paused for a moment, and, when Ransome seated himself by his stepmother, he took a seat several chairs away from them.

For a moment there was silence, while the minister glanced very impressively around the room ; then came in a rich, intoned voice, the opening words of the service :

"I am the Resurrection and the Life, whosoever believeth Me though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever believeth in Me shall never die."

So for a while I listened ; the words expressing the world's hope of immortality. The clergyman was, I think, Underwood's former minister, a short man, whose round, red face and figure, verging on obesity, showed that good living was not unknown to him. He was reading rather well, intoning his voice, using his deep, full

voice carefully. As I watched him, I asked myself, did he really believe what he was reading, or was it a task to be gone through, a task unpleasant in itself, but brightened by the fat fee he would receive?

But I soon lost interest in the service, and glanced across the room at Mrs. Underwood. She was dressed in black but was not wearing a hat. Even in her mourning one could not but mark her beauty. Her dark black hair set off by contrast the ivory whiteness of her face. Only her lips, like a crimson line, showed any colour. As she leaned back in her chair, the close-fitting dress showed the perfect lines of her figure. Though she was pale, yet she was bearing the service well, though at times the words of the minister touched her, and I saw her brush away a tear. The son sat erect, his lips shut tight, the face without expression, his eyes never leaving the face of the clergyman. Yet, though he did not show it, somehow it seemed to me that he was feeling the greatest grief. There was something in the tense figure and the unyielding lines of the face that gave him a hint of the emotion within. The playwright, Ransome, seated by the side of Mrs. Underwood, was apparently far more interested in her than in anything else. On the other side of the room, solemn and dignified, Phelps sat alone.

To me the service seemed endless. But at length it was finished, and one could hear almost a sigh of relief. There was the usual wait, while the undertaker got ready, then the last look at the body, and the bearing of it out to the waiting automobiles. This I did not see, for I had gone to the room for the revolver. There was a chance to ride up to the city, and I thought it a good time to see if the clerk would recognize it as the gun that he had sold.

I was given a seat in an automobile with Bartley and Phelps, and in a moment we ran out of the estate and started on our journey to the train. No one spoke as we rode to the city, and the ride seemed longer because of this. I left them at the station, after a parting word with Bartley, and walked down to the hardware store.

The clerk was busy at his counter and recognized me.

I pushed the gun over to him, with the words, "Ever see this before?"

He took some time in looking it over, and at last said, "It's the gun I was telling you about the other day. I'll tell you how I know. You see it's black, and I wondered one day if it was painted or not, and took a file and scratched through the paint to see. You can see the mark on the trigger guard."

He handed it back to me, and sure enough, on the trigger guard was a faint scratch, through which one could see the glint of the steel. If he was sure, then one piece of work was over. And he was sure. In response to my questions he assured me that was the very gun he had sold, and told again how he had scratched it with a file. So, thanking him, I left him.

I took the car back to the shore, a thirty-minute run, and then looked up the Severance cottage. They called it a cottage, but in reality it was a copy of an old colonial house, set in the midst of a green lawn, a lawn that ran down to the limpid water of the bay. I climbed the steps and, finding no bell, let the brass knocker fall several times.

The maid who answered the door took my card and ushered me into a large living-room. It was a copy of a colonial interior. I was looking at an old grandfather clock, one whose dial had above it a gaily painted ship that sailed over a dark blue sea, followed by a little pink moon, when Mrs. Severance entered.

She came towards me with a smile; a woman of thirty, but looking some years younger. Glancing at my card, she said, "I am so glad, Mr. Pelt, that you came over. You can give me some advice, at least. I feel so mortified that anything should happen while the ambassador was my guest."

She rambled on for some time. Though we were not going to take the case, yet I wanted to hear the story.

The night before she had given a dinner, followed by a dance in honour of the Italian ambassador. He was well known to her husband, and had been with them several days as their guest. The invited guests

numbered twenty-five, all people well known in the social world. After dinner the ambassador went to his room for his cigarette case, and when he returned told her his pocket-book was missing. While he dressed he had placed it on a table in his room, and evidently had forgotten it. While at dinner he remembered he had left it on the table, and remembering he had a code letter in it from his government, he became alarmed and went up for it. When he turned on the light it was gone. Later, when Mrs. Severance went to her room she discovered that a pearl necklace that her husband had given her several days before was missing from her jewel case. Rather than have any newspaper notoriety about it, they decided to say nothing about it. The pearls had been taken, and the ambassador had lost his pocket-book, though the thing that troubled him was not the loss of his money but the code letter that was in the pocket-book. I had intended simply to listen to her story, but she insisted that I go to the room that the ambassador had been in and look it over. I followed her out into the hall, and up the stairs to the second floor, to a room at the front of the house. The room was locked, but she had the key, and as she unlocked the door told me that her husband and the ambassador had both gone to the city.

The ambassador had been given a suite of three rooms, containing a bath, bedroom, and parlour. The room we entered was the parlour, and in the centre was a large mission table covered with books and magazines. Mrs. Severance pointed to it, saying he placed his pocket-book there.

I made a hurried search of the three rooms, finding that they opened into each other, and that the only way to enter them was through the door that we had just come through.

"Did he lock the door when he went out," I asked.

"Yes, no one else had a key. He came down without any valet, and my husband gave him his man, but he had left the room before the ambassador did."

I went into the bedroom, and, seeing an open window,

glanced out. It was impossible for any one to get in through the window unless they used a ladder, for it was at least twenty feet from the ground, and the soft dirt of the flower beds beneath showed no signs of a ladder having been used. But when I went into the bathroom it was different. The bathroom was at the end of the house, off the bedroom, with one window that was half open. The screen was not in, but was standing, as if placed by the side of the bath tub, which was directly under the window. When I looked out, I found that the end of the piazza roof that ran around the house was only two feet below, and at once found what I was beginning to suspect had taken place.

I remembered the rain and fog of the night before. It would have been an easy thing for any one to have climbed up the side of the piazza to the roof, and thus to have entered through the bathroom window. The fog had been so thick that there was hardly a chance that they would have been seen. But if any one had done that, their shoes must have been incrusted with mud, and they would hardly have been able not to have left some traces. This I found to be so. Starting at the further end of the piazza, where the trellis work, which was strong enough to support a man, met the roof, I found traces of mud, the bars of the trellis also showed that some one had climbed on them, for mud was on every one. The dirt, in fact, ran to the window, and there was no doubt that during the night some one had climbed up the trellis and had gone through the window into the house. Going inside, I found the dirt on the side of the bath tub nearest the window, just where a person would have had to have stepped in entering from the roof. Going back into the room, I found several more traces of dirt, and mud stains on the rug. It was easy to see that whoever came in the room had come by the way I had pointed out. But there is a good deal of luck in finding clues, and it happened in this case. Obeying some instinct, I went back to the bathroom and again climbed out on the roof, going over to the trellis. And there in the gutter that carried off

the water I found a tiepin. It was a queer sort of a pin, shaped like the head of a cat, with eyes of red stones, and with black whiskers painted on the gold face. There seemed little doubt in my mind that the person that climbed up the roof had lost the pin. If he had discovered his loss, he evidently had not found the pin again for it was in my hand. For some reason I decided to say nothing to Mrs. Severance just then about my find, but to show it to Bartley, and so placed it in my pocket. There was little I would say to Mrs. Severance, except to explain that the thief had no doubt climbed into the house by the window, and to tell her that Bartley was away. She insisted that I should ask him to come over and see her about the matter on his return, and, promising this, I left the house.

It was about noon, and, rather than go back to the house to lunch, I decided to go to the Ocean House. I had told Jenkins that I would call him up, if I did not return, and I could do it there. But as I passed by the telephone exchange, I thought of another matter. Bartley had asked that I try to trace the 'phone call, the one that had come to the hardware store on the day the revolver was bought. I knew that, as a rule, the long distance calls are placed on slips and sent into the office, where they are kept for some months. But the exchange at the Point was not the main office, only a small affair to take care of the summer business. Still they might know something about it, so I entered. The manager, when I told him what I was after, said that there should not be much trouble in finding it. He informed me that in May there was only about a dozen cottages open, and that as the stores and hotels did not open till the first of June there were no public exchanges or 'phone. If there had been the call could not be traced. It so happened that he had the pay call slips, or rather long distance slips, for May on file. It took him only a few minutes to find the date that I wanted, and he came back with the slips in his hand.

There were only seven, as I remember. I took a notebook and started to copy the 'phones that had been

used, and after I had done this he said he would tell me who they belonged to. Four of the calls were of no use to me, for they were to distant cities. But three people at the Point had called Eastwood on that day. He read the 'phone numbers off to the girl at the switch, and she called out the names of the people owning the 'phones. The first two I wrote down, but when she called out the third, my pencil paused for a moment, for it was Underwood's. Somebody, on the day that the revolver had been bought, had called up Eastwood, and I remembered that the clerk in the store was sure that the call came from the Point.

I turned in some surprise, saying to the manager, "I did not think the Underwood cottage was open at that time."

He answered, "It was open ; at least there was somebody there for a few days, for we connected the 'phone about that time. I think that it was only open a few days. I forget who was down. But I have a letter somewhere from Mrs. Underwood asking me to have the 'phone connected by the first of May."

I thanked him and went out. I had enough to think over. It had been my impression that it was not till the end of May that the Underwood cottage had been opened, yet here was the 'phone call from the house early in the month, on the very day that the revolver had been bought. It was damaging, I thought for a moment, but then stopped to consider that there had been two other calls on the same day from the Point to the town. Still we were getting somewhere, if it only was possible to link all the things together.

Still thinking about it, I reached the hotel and entered. As I reached the desk the clerk hailed me, telling me I was wanted on the 'phone. It was Jenkins who wanted me.

"Hullo, Pelt," he said. "Got something for you."

"Yes," I replied.

"After you left, about an hour and a half after, a messenger boy drifted in, and said he wanted you. He was all filled up with some idea about ten dollars that

you said you would give him. He told me that he would tell me if I would give him the money, so I took a chance. He said he had seen that car again, the one you asked about. And the number is 77,854 N. Y. I will keep him here till you see him."

"That's all right about the money. Keep the boy till I get back," I answered, and rung off.

I dropped the receiver and stood a moment thinking. The boy evidently had found the car, found it the day after I had seen him. But somehow the fact that it bore a New York number bothered me the most. That was a thing I had not been expecting. I wondered a moment and decided to call up Albany and see if the Automobile Bureau would give me the name of the person that owned the car. I acted on the thought, and after some little time got my call in. When I secured the capitol in Albany, they were not very keen to tell me anything about the number. But by using Bartley's name and saying that I would call the secretary of state, whom he knew, I secured the promise that they would get it for me, and call me up at the hotel.

I went into the dining-room, now almost empty, for I had used up so much time in calling Albany that the lunch hour was over. The head waiter gave me the table that I liked the best, by the window where one could see the sea, and I ordered the lunch. I had in fact finished it when the waiter came over and told me that I was wanted on the 'phone. Going to a booth, I took up the receiver. The voice came to me faintly, for the wires were singing.

"Is this Mr. Pelt? Mr. Pelt, this is the Capitol Albany, the Albany capitol. You wished information of licence number 77,854. We find that it was taken out in January in the name of——"

The name almost caused me to drop the 'phone in my surprise.

"Hullo, Mr. Pelt," came the voice again. "The licence 77,854 was taken out in January by John Underwood of New York City."

CHAPTER XIII

FOG SHROUDED VOICES

FOR a moment I stood holding the receiver in my hand, too startled even to think. I have had some things that have surprised me since I worked with Bartley, but nothing that gave me the start that the words I heard over the telephone did. In fact, I was so startled that I tried again to ask them what they said, but they hung up the 'phone.

I hastened now to return to the Underwood mansion. I found Jenkins at the front of the house. With him was the little red-headed messenger boy that I had seen the day before. We grinned a greeting and without waiting for me to say anything he started,

"I found that car ; told you I would do it ; it was as easy as falling off a house."

"Where did you see it ?" I asked.

"Well, it was like this. I was at the station playing with a couple of kids, and I saw a number of cars taking away that person that was killed here. And in the bunch, I noticed the car I saw that afternoon."

"Did you see the man that sent you for the gun ?" I asked, eagerly.

"I don't know. I worked out that you wanted that man more than the car, but there was nothing doing. He was not with that crowd."

"You are sure about the car ?" I asked.

He threw out his hands, and simply grinned.

"Absolutely sure certain. I never saw a car like it and I saw it this morning all right."

I turned to Jenkins. "They must be back from the station by this time."

He nodded. "They got back a couple of hours ago, and the cars are out in the garage now."

"Let's look at them."

I led the way to the garage, which was some distance from the house, near the road. The floor contained six machines, but none of the chauffeurs were in sight. Jenkins went in search of the man in charge of the garage, while I asked Jimmy to point out the car he had seen. Without any trouble, he went to the third car in the row, saying, "That's it."

No wonder he said he would remember it if he ever saw it again. It was a great red English machine, the largest car I have ever seen. I say car, though it would carry four. There were few of the make in the country, and I doubt if there were any others at the Point. If a man saw it once, he should remember it for ever. While looking at it, Jenkins came back with the mechanic who had charge of all the cars. He was interested and a trifle nervous, but that was no doubt due to the fact that the servants were excited over having the police, as they called us, stationed at the house. He was a short man, with a red face, eager to give any information that he could.

"Smith," I asked, "I understand this car was used this morning?"

He nodded his assent, saying, "They all were."

We stood looking at the car for a while, I wondering who could have used it at the time the gun was bought. But that was what I must find out, if I could. I turned to the mechanic.

"Smith, can you tell me if this car was down here in May?"

He looked surprised, saying as he shook his head, "I don't think so. You know the place was not opened till the first of June, and we brought all the cars down then."

For a moment I thought that something must be wrong. If it was the car that the boy had seen, then it must have been at the Point in May. But the mechanic was telling me that the cars had not been sent to the shore till the cottage opened in June. So, more not knowing what to say than anything else, I asked,

"Where was this car the fourth of May?"

Smith thought a moment, saying,

"As I remember we had it overhauled about that time. As a rule we do all our own work, but this big English car is hard to get at, and I think we had it painted. The madam wanted it red instead of green, and it was about that time it was done. Still, my book will tell."

He went off, and no sooner was he out of hearing than the boy who had been listening with an eager air, broke forth,

"I don't care what that man says, this car was the one that I saw that day. It had a big bear on it, over the thing in front, and there is the bear."

He pointed to the radiator, on the top of which was a bronze bear over a foot high. There was no doubt that the boy felt sure that this was the car that he had seen, but Smith had said the car was not down to the shore then. Either he or the boy was wrong, and I decided that the boy knew what he was talking about. Smith was back before we could say anything more, with a small book in his hand.

"It was the third of May when we sent the car to the garage. It was there three weeks before we got it back."

This seemed to dispose of the fact that the car had been seen by the boy. If it was sent to the garage on the third of May, there was no doubt that it could not have changed its colour from green to red over night, and be at the Point the next day. Yet the boy had been very insistent that he had seen it. But while this was in my mind Smith said suddenly,

"Come to think of it, the car was painted the month before. We sent it to the garage in May, but I forgot that we had it painted three or four weeks before that."

One of the other men was in the end of the garage working on a car, and he called to him.

"Jim, do you remember when we had the English car painted? It was before we sent it to be overhauled, wasn't it?"

The man came strolling up, and taking a pipe from his mouth, said,

"That's right, boss ; but it was not overhauled at the time you sent it to the garage."

Smith looked startled for a moment, and then brought his fist down on his other hand.

"My God, you are right ! " He turned to me. "We sent this to the garage, I remember about it now that Jim speaks, and Mr. Underwood had us bring it back. We sent it in the morning, and in the afternoon the madam drove it down to the Point. I think she was down here for a couple of days. When she came back they left it at the garage."

"Who're they who came down with her ? "

"I don't know," he said, "who came down with her. But I remember that Mr. Underwood called up asking for this car, and when I told him it was at the garage, he sent to get it, for Mrs Underwood wanted to go down to the Point. I know he did not drive it down, but I don't know who took it to the garage."

If I had done nothing else since I had been at the house, at least I had proven that the revolver, and the fact that it had been sold to some one from Underwood's own house, was a fact. The cottage had been open in May, and the telephone call had come from the house, as the manager of the exchange had said. The boy was right, and had seen the car on the streets of Eastwood, as he said, on the fourth of May. But the next problem was to discover who bought the gun, and then it would go a long way towards solving the problem of the murder. Leaving the garage, I thanked the boy and gave him another five dollars, and he went away with a happy heart.

It was getting late in the afternoon, and Jenkins and myself, who had the house to ourselves, with the exception of the servants, went round to the great piazza and seated ourselves in a couple of armchairs. We had nothing to tell each other that was of any importance, and we ran over the events of the day. For a while we rested, smoking our cigars, and then after a while he turned to me.

"What do you think of that fellow Vance ? "

For a moment I said nothing, then replying, "Oh, I don't know. I have not given him much thought."

Jenkins toyed with his cigar, then saying, "I have thought out that perhaps he might know as much about this affair as any one else. Take it from me, at the inquest he had his knife out for that young man. Every chance he got he made a jab at him."

This was the very thing that I had thought myself some hours before, but I had said nothing about it, nor did I then, and he went on :

"Now, I have an idea that this fellow Vance knows more than he tells. Why not take a line that he does ? He said he went up to his room after he left his boss, and then went down to post some letters. Who saw him go back ? Understand, who saw him go back ? And that butler was around at that time, but he did not see him. Then he said he left letters on the table, but who saw him ? Nobody ever said anything about any letters."

I had not thought of that, but then it struck me that no one had asked any questions about the letters. Either it had been overlooked, or thought of not being of any importance. So I said,

"Maybe there is something in that. We might ask the postman. When does he get at the house ? "

"He gets here early, about eight o'clock, but I asked the servants, and no one saw him come that morning."

After talking it over for a few moments we went round to the garage and got a car, and ran down to the post office. Here we found we were in luck, for the postman that carried Underwood's mail was in. He turned out to be a bright college student, that carried the mail for a summer job. We told him what we were after, and asked him if he had found any mail to go out the morning that Underwood was killed. He shook his head.

"As a rule I never get much post at the house. They send most of it down to the office. The morning that he was killed, I picked up a card or so, but no letters of any kind."

Jenkins gave me a look that said a good deal, but did not say a word. I thought that maybe the letter carrier

might have been mistaken, but he stuck to his story, saying that there had been no letters and that he was sure of it.

Vance apparently had not told the truth when he said that he had gone downstairs after he went to his room, to place some letters on the stand. I recalled the contradictory mention of ten o'clock to us and eleven to the coroner, and I wondered if he had told the truth about hearing the voices in the library, and if he had gone downstairs at all. Walking back to the house, we talked the thing over, reaching no conclusion. There was only one apparent fact. It was that if Vance should have to testify in case the son was arrested, a good lawyer might knock out all his evidence against the boy.

When we reached the house, I went up to the rooms to rest. I decided to call it a day, and picking up a book threw myself in a chair and read for several hours. After dinner I resumed my reading, but before I retired I decided to go out on the beach for a stroll.

It was not a very good night. It was foggy again, the same dense fog that we had been having for the past four days. A fog that came in about dark, and that by midnight was very dense. The beach, of course, was deserted when I reached it, and I turned and walked towards the Golf Club. The surf was rather high, and its sound deadened all others. I had walked along for about five minutes, and had about made up my mind to go back to the house, when above the noise of the surf I heard the sound of voices in front of me. I listened a moment and discovered that they came from a little above me. Obeying an impulse, I walked carefully along for a few yards and paused. This time I distinguished Vance's voice, but what he was saying I could not tell. This time the voice came from behind me, though slightly above where I was standing. Carefully, in order to make no noise, I walked towards it. There was little chance of being heard, that was if I was careful, for the surf hid all other sounds. I could not be seen, for the fog was thick enough to make it impossible to see above a foot or so. So I picked my way carefully, paus-

ing now and then to listen. When I got, as I thought, within a few yards of the voices, I got down on my knees and crept forward. In a second I ran my head against what seemed the side of a house, but the blow was slight. For a second I wondered what I had hit, and then remembered that up the beach from the house was the ruins of an old wreck, a fishing boat that sometime had been driven high and dry on the shore by a storm. It was that which my head had hit.

By its side I stopped. The voices were near, and I could tell that they were above me. Evidently whoever it was had gone on the side nearest the shore, to get out of the fog. I could smell the tobacco from a cigarette, and heard the strike of a match and saw the little flame as some one lighted another.

I decided to stay where I was, for I could not get any nearer. Above all, I wanted to hear what Vance was saying, and wondered what he was doing out that night. But the voice that I heard first was not that of Vance, nor that of any one that I had heard. It was a rather high voice, unpleasant and affected, that drawled a bit. I heard it say with a laugh, " You see, I have got to get back to-morrow. They don't know I am down here."

Vance grunted back, " No one will ever find out. It was not necessary anyway to come down."

The other man laughed. " I don't know ; these foggy nights are a godsend ; it could not have been better last night."

I heard Vance reply, " No, but I did get a scare at that. We will have to go slow after this."

Back came the reply, " Well, we can afford to go slow, as you call it."

For a while there was silence, broken only by the sound of the surf. Then the other man said to Vance, " I would not like to live in that house with those two detectives. It would get on my nerves."

Vance laughed, " As for that fellow Pelt and the cop Jenkins, there is nothing to fear from them. Bartley is different. I am afraid of that fellow ; one can't tell what he knows. But the other two——! That man Pelt

could not see anything if it was before his eyes, and Jenkins is only a thick headed Irishman."

I confess that I blushed a bit in the dark, and then felt a bit mad. Anyway Vance's feeling towards me was shared by a bitter dislike on my part for him. But my thoughts were broken by the voice of Vance saying, "Well, one more cigarette and then I am going."

The reply came, "All right; you understand about the things, where they are, and you have the key. You better get them at night. No one will see you then."

My mind was working rapidly connecting this conversation with several things that had recently happened. But there was another thing to think of. If Vance was going right back to the house, it was time for me to get away. I did not want to be seen, nor did I want to come in after he did. There was no way by which I could tell who was with him without revealing my own presence. So I crept away from the wreck, and after I had reached a spot some yards away, I rose to my feet and ran for the house.

When I entered, the hall light was dim and the hall deserted. A thought struck me that maybe Vance had been talking with some one in the house and that he might come in with him. From the head of the stairs I would be able to see him as he came in the hall. Leaving the door of my room open, so I could reach it in a moment, I took my stand by the stairs. It was only about ten minutes later that I heard the door in the hall open. Glancing through the rails of the stairs, I saw Vance, alone. As he came to the stairs on his way to his room, I went into mine and closed the door. I did not turn on the light till I heard his feet pass the door and knew that he had gone to the other storey to his own room.

CHAPTER XIV

THE POLICE DECIDE

I HAD expected that Bartley would only be away over one night, but when I went down to breakfast the next morning there was a telegram at my plate, in which he said that he would not be back till the next afternoon, and asked me to meet him.

It turned out to be a lazy day ; there was little, if anything to do, so I simply lounged around the house. When I got the chance to get Jenkins by himself, I told him something of what I had learned regarding Vance and we decided that if Vance went anywhere that night that we would follow him.

But when night came Vance did not leave the house, spending his time after dinner in his room, and going to bed about eleven. So after we saw the lights go out in his room, and waited a while to see that he did not come down, we also retired.

I was at the station the next day, several minutes before the train came in. The car that I had secured from the seven in the garage, I had driven myself, thinking that Bartley must have some reason in asking me to meet him. When the train came in, Bartley was nearly the last person out of the parlour car. He carried but a small hand bag, which I noticed he had not given to the porter. When he saw me he gave a wave of his hand, and a smile and climbed into the seat by my side.

For a few moments we did little talking, for the street was crowded with cars, and it took all my attention to get the car through the crowded traffic. But when we turned down the long expanse of Elm Street that led to the shore, he turned to me and said, " Well, did you enjoy yourself while I was away ? "

I informed him that I had been rather bored, and then told him in detail what I had done. I described the

robbery at the Severance cottage, to which he simply said, "We are not going to bother with that anyway."

Then I told him about the telephone calls on the day that the gun was bought. He agreed that there was not much doubt that the call must have come from Underwood's. He did at this point break in on the order of my story by asking if I was sure that the cottage was open at that time. I told him what the men in the garage said, that it was open at that time for a few days. Then I came to the story of the car, telling how the boy had seen it the morning of the funeral, and then told of calling up Albany to find out whose it was. With an air of mystery I asked,

"And whom do you think the car belonged to?"

Bartley turned to me, and with a little smile said,

"Well, I presume you will answer 'Underwood.'"

I gave a start, at his answer, but said,

"That's it. It was Underwood's. How did you guess it?"

He simply laughed at my wonder.

"Why, that was easy. You say the boy saw it at the station the morning of the funeral. Then you put on an air of mystery and ask whom do I think that car belonged to. But seriously, Pelt, I am not much surprised. I had an idea that when you found that car you might discover just what you did."

I pondered over his reply for a while, then asked the question that was in my mind,

"Did you find anything of importance, in the city?"

He shook his head,

"In a sense, no, nothing that can explain the crime."

We had by this time turned into the avenue that led to the Golf Club, the avenue on which was the Underwood estate, and soon were in front of the house. The butler met us as we entered, and it was plain to see that the old man was worried. He hurried to our side, and said,

"Mr. Bartley, the chief of police is waiting in the library. He asked me if he might see you, and when

I told him that Mr. Pelt had gone to the city to meet you, he said that he would wait till you returned."

So we went into the library where the chief was waiting. I have not the greatest respect for the average chief of police, and the chief of the Eastwood police was a little worse than the average. He was a man of about fifty, and even his best friends would have admitted that he was fat. His blue uniform was filled with creases, and might have looked better if he had cleaned it once in a while. In fact, his whole general impression made one smile when one thought that he was expected to solve the Underwood mystery. But it was plain that he had a very good opinion of himself, and when he turned to us as soon as we entered the room his first words were,

"Mr. Bartley, I expect to arrest to-morrow the murderer of Mr. Underwood."

Even Bartley gave a start at this, but the next second a faint smile played around his lips.

"You do?" was all he said.

The chief threw back what he called his chest, and answered,

"Yes, sir. We will have him locked up to-morrow night."

"And who is it?" asked Bartley.

"Robert Underwood," and he paused, waiting to see what impression his words had made on us.

For myself, I was not surprised. I knew that the police always, no matter what the case was, wished to make an arrest. It impressed the public, made them think that the police were on their jobs, and then above all was good for the newspapers. The police, like everybody else, loved newspaper publicity. The evidence at the coroner's inquest was enough to cause any chief of police to arrest the young man, especially when there was absolutely no one else to whom any suspicion attached. So I was not so much surprised at his remark as I might have been. But he continued,

"You see, we have evidence of his quarrel with his father. You know all about that. Also we have found out that he bought a gun last year. We don't know where it is now, but it doesn't matter."

I started to speak, but Bartley checked me with a warning look. For a moment I had been on the verge of telling him that we had the gun with which the murder had been committed, but Bartley's sign told me that he did not wish the chief to know anything about it. The gesture was not seen, and the chief continued,

"We will arrest him to-morrow, when they return from New York. I myself would not be surprised if the young man, knowing how strong the case is against him, took a chance to escape and did not return at all."

Bartley gave a little sign of disgust at this, and replied in an impatient tone,

"Don't worry about that. He will be here. I give you my word for that."

After that the chief lost his important air, and tried to find out if Bartley had discovered anything that they might use against the young man. But his efforts were of no avail, for Bartley refused to give him any information at all. So after a while he got up and left us, but not before Bartley had written a note, which he told him to give to the district attorney at once. As he left the room, Bartley turned with disgust in his face, saying, "To think we expect such men to guard us from expert criminals."

I had noticed while the chief had been in the room that Williams had taken pains to hang around within hearing distance. He seemed to be eager to discover what was being said, and I wondered why. But we soon found out, for, after the chief left, the butler came up to Bartley. His face was flushed, and it was plain that he was frightened. His hands trembled, and even his voice shook as to Bartley he said,

"Mr. Bartley, they won't arrest the young man, will they, sir? Why, he would not have harmed his father. I know that he would not."

Bartley's face softened as he looked at the old butler, an appealing figure, with his bent figure and white hair, and he answered,

"Don't worry about the boy, Williams; he will be all right."

This answer seemed to assure the old man, for he turned to go, but Bartley stopped him, motioning him to a chair and drawing two by his side for ourselves.

"Williams," he said, "I want to ask you several questions."

The butler looked at him in surprise.

"When you entered the room after you broke the door, who went in first?"

The old man thought a moment before answering,

"It was Mrs. Underwood. Vance came next, and I last."

"And what did she do? I mean, tell me just what she did?"

"Why, sir, she ran over to her husband's side, and knelt there, feeling of his hands. We all saw that he had been shot, and she was trying to see, I think, if he was dead."

Bartley thoughtfully asked,

"And where did you and Vance stand?"

"Why, sir, I think we were right beside her."

Bartley walked from his chair to the door, and stood looking at the desk. I knew that he was trying to picture how the scene must have looked as the three people grouped themselves around the body. Coming back to our side, he asked,

"Now, did she send any of you out of the room?"

"Why, yes, she asked me to go and 'phone for a doctor, and when I was coming back I met Vance, who said that the madam had sent him to tell me to call up all the doctors that I could find in the 'phone book till I got one that was able to come down."

I saw the interested look flash over Bartley's face, as he said,

"So that left her alone in the room?"

The butler looked curious, but answered,

"Why, yes, but only for a moment,"

"And when you returned where was she?"

"In the same place, sir, kneeling by his side."

"Would you say you were both out of the room for the space of five minutes?"

The butler shook his head.

"Oh, no, sir, not as long as that, only three at the most."

Then to my surprise, Bartley again asked him to tell the story of how they found the windows. The story was the same as before, the old man saying that Vance tried the windows but was unable to open them, and that he then tried them and they were locked.

Bartley waited till he was through and said,

"Which window did you try first?"

The butler turned and pointed to the central window.

"I tried that one first, and then leaned over and tried the other two, but both, or, as I said, all of them were locked."

Bartley walked over to the windows and stood looking not at them, but at the sea wall outside. In a few moments he returned, and turning to the old man placed his hand on his shoulder.

"Don't worry about the boy, Williams. He will come out all right."

The butler rose to his feet, and gave Bartley a thankful look and left the room.

Bartley pulled out his watch and turning to me said,

"Pelt, what do you say to a few holes of golf?"

I was willing, and we went up to the rooms and changed into our golfing things. I was dressed first and went into Bartley's room to wait for him. He was humming a little air from one of the musical comedies, engaged in the meantime in hunting for a shirt. Wondering what he had expected to get out of the butler, I asked him why it was he had gone over the butler's story again, for we had heard it twice before. He waited till I finished, and then without looking up asked,

"You remember that revolver that I found in the young man's room? How do you suppose the revolver got under Robert's bed?"

Having nothing to suggest I shook my head.

"Well," he said, "I have been doing some thinking while on the train, and one of the things that bothered me was that revolver being where it was."

I broke in on him.

" Maybe the murderer placed it there."

But he shook his head. He had put his shirt on by this time, and threw himself into a chair, after lighting a cigar.

" Maybe he did. But I somehow don't think so. Now, whoever killed Underwood was, to say the least, very cunning. They, as you say, got out of the room ; they did the deed without any one even hearing the shot ; they have managed to hide all traces of the crime, at least it looks so. Now, do you think a person shrewd enough to commit this crime would be foolish enough to place the revolver where it would be found as easy as it was ? "

I suggested a thought striking me,

" They may have done it to throw suspicion on the young man."

Bartley nodded,

" Yes, that is reasonable enough, and it looks as if that might be so. But do you realize what that leads you to ? "

" No."

" In fact," continued Bartley, " it leads us to several things. First of all it brings up the question as to when it was placed there, and secondly that it must have been placed there by some one familiar with the house. Take the first thing. Now I have a theory as to what the means were by which the person got out of the house."

I started to ask an eager question, but he motioned to me to stop.

" I won't tell you yet, try to puzzle it out yourself ; it's plain enough. But it means that we must think that the murderer placed the gun there soon after the crime. The first thought would be to get rid of the gun, but why he threw it under the boy's bed is another question. But placing that aside, I have a theory that it may be that the murderer left the gun in the room."

This seemed rather foolish to me, for there had been three people that had said there had been no gun in the room, Vance, Williams and Mrs. Underwood. I said this to Bartley. For a moment he said nothing, and then answered,

"I know that, Pelt, but I have an idea that maybe the gun was in the room when they entered. In the excitement they may not have all seen it, but one might have done so and have taken care that the others did not. Now three people entered the room, Vance, Williams and Mrs. Underwood. Let us say that their first thought was for the man in the chair. They rush to his side first, and then one of them sees the gun, and hides it."

It seemed to me a rather far-fetched story, but I fell into it, and said,

"But which one?"

Bartley smiled rather slowly, and answered my question with another.

"That's it, which one? But to continue the theory. To hide the gun, it would be necessary to have the two that did not see it out of the room. Who was able to command that? Not Vance, not Williams, only——"

I answered him as he paused,

"Only Mrs. Underwood."

He nodded, his face serious as he said,

"Only Mrs. Underwood. Now take what Williams said. She sent him out to call up a doctor. That was natural enough, but he said that a moment after Vance came out and told him she wished him to call up all the doctors. Now that was hardly needed, Mrs. Underwood must have known that Williams did not need that advice. He would not stop till he found he had secured a doctor that was not busy. The fact that she sent Vance to tell Williams—that struck me strange when the butler told us. I will admit that on the train I had not made up my mind as to which one (that is, of course, if the theory is right) saw a gun there and hid it. It might have been any of them. But I knew that the person that did hide it (if it was there to be hidden) had to have the opportunity of being alone. No one but Mrs. Underwood had that, and she seemed to seek that chance herself."

"But," I asked, "how could she keep them from seeing the gun while they were in the room?"

"Let us assume," was the answer; "assuming, just for the sake of theory, that she saw the gun when she

came in the room. She went to his side and sank on the floor, let us say, covering the gun with her dress. Williams said she did something very like that, and did not rise while they were in the room. When they returned she was still kneeling. In the time they were out of the room she would have been able to hide the gun in her dress."

It sounded very plausible, but still I wondered what he could have to base it on. But as for that, he did not tell me, simply saying,

"Now, if that is true, it simply means, at least I think it means, that she knew who that gun belonged to, and that she did not wish it found. The throwing it under the bed was the illogical thing, that a nervous woman might have done. She intending no doubt, to get it as soon as she could and remove it to a safer place. How does that strike you ?"

It seemed rather far fetched to me, though if one was sure that the gun had been left behind after the murder then it would be reasonable. But, at that, Bartley had a well-knit theory established if nothing more, and in answer to his question I said,

"It sounds all right, but you don't even know if Mrs. Underwood knew there was a gun found."

"No," he drawled, "but I do know that she has asked me four times if any one had found the gun. Not only that ; her talk to me on the train was all about murder cases, and the revolvers with which the deeds were done. If our new science is right, her conversation proves that it's not guns she is interested in but one particular gun."

I could say nothing to this, and waited for Bartley to say more. But he rose to his feet and went to the closet for the golf bags. Finding them, he turned.

"You forget another thing, Pelt. If the murderer put the gun under the bed, then it must have been some one in the house ; some one that had time enough to do it, say, on the night of the murder."

He was at the door by this time. I rose to follow him, but could not resist a parting word,

"Well, if you say she did it, then she might have been the murderer."

His hand was on the knob, and the door had been half opened. At my words, he turned and closed the door, turning a serious face to me.

"That's true," was all he said.

I must confess that when I had said that Mrs. Underwood might have committed the murder I had done so simply to show Bartley into what lengths his theory might take him. I never expected that he would seriously say that it might be true. In fact, I had to look at his face a second time before I was sure he was not having a bit of fun with me. But his lips were not smiling, and there was no doubt that he had been serious in what he had said. With his hand still on the knob of the door, which he kept closed, he glanced at me again and said,

"Pelt, I am going to give you something to think over. Every one of the persons that were in the house the night of the murder might have done it. And next, every one of the three who first broke into the room the morning they found him dead are also apt to know something about it. That was why I agreed with what you suggested about Mrs. Underwood. Till we know who committed the crime, she is just as much under suspicion as any one else ; no more so, no less so. But come on ; we want to get up to the club."

There are, they say, a few better golf courses in the country than the one at the Point, but only a few. For the merit of the course that we were to play over lies in the fact that it is a purely natural course. It follows the rolling hills and streams, and then goes down to the great flats by the sea. There are better courses, they claim, but it takes a good player to turn in a respectable score at the Point. But one thing is sure ; no golf club ever had a more beautiful location. High upon a hill, which stood above the surrounding country was the club house, with its dozen or so tennis courts. From the house one got a view of many miles of sea, with the Point and its many cottages two miles away. Far out across the water one could see, on a clear day, the tall light of Montauk Point, and the thin line of Long Island. In another direction, near, Block Island stood forth on nearly any

kind of a day that was clear ; its sand cliffs white in the sunshine.

I have said, I think, that though Bartley liked to play golf far better than any other game, yet it was not the game he could play best. Just why that was so I never understood, for he played tennis with a skill and speed and sureness of eye that made him the master of almost all with whom he played. But his golf was at times a weird and wonderful thing to see ; bad shots, easy approaches bungled, and then startling by long and sure drives mixed in for good measure.

As a rule I was able to beat him nearly every day we played. But this afternoon, from the time he drove from the first tee, a long straight drive that ended two hundred yards away in the middle of the course, until he made a fifteen-foot putt at the ninth hole, he easily defeated me. Try as I could, and I was playing a safe average game, he would outdrive me and output me.

At the ninth hole, we rested a while, waiting for several men who were ahead of us to play. They were taking their time about it, and were engaged in an animated conversation. What they were talking about I did not find out, but did hear one of them say rather loudly,

" It will get him out of a big hole, for he has been hardly hit in the stock market. It could not have come at a better time."

Who or what they were talking about I did not know, but the others agreed with the speaker. I paid little attention to them, though I thought Bartley was listening rather closely.

But after that, when we started on the tenth hole, Bartley's game went all to pieces. He pulled his drives, drove into the rough, went into several sand pits, and wound up by placing three balls one after another into a little pond. But I could see that he was paying little attention to his game. And then all at once it flashed over me that I had never told him of my encounter with Vance the night before. So I told him about the walk I took on the beach, and the voices that I heard. When I had finished he asked,

"Was there anything about the voice of the second man that you could remember?"

"Yes," I answered, "it was a rather high, thin voice. The man seemed to use an affected accent and drawled out his words."

He stopped and picked up his ball, which was laying at his feet, and placed it in his pocket. Then turning to me, he asked,

"Did it sound like this?"

And then I heard the very tones, it seemed almost the voice, that I had heard while I was on the beach.

"That's it," I said.

He smiled.

"I thought so, and our golf is over for the day. We better get back to the house."

I followed him up to the club and into the car. I wanted to ask him why he had changed his plans, and how it was he knew who the man was whose voice I had heard. But I had been with Bartley long enough to know that he would tell me in the proper time. And so we rode back to the house, a silent drive, for Bartley seemed to be in a thinking mood and did not talk. But though I had my attention taken in driving the car, yet I wondered all the while why he had returned to the house before our game was over.

CHAPTER XV

THE CLEVEREST PLANNED MURDER

AS soon as we entered the house Bartley sent for Williams and asked him if any one was waiting to see him. The butler answered that though there was no one that wished to see him yet he did have a message for him, adding that there had been a telephone call for him, and that when he said he was out he had been told to say to Mr. Bartley that District Attorney Sullivan would see him the next morning.

Bartley made a little grimace at this, but beyond telling Williams that we would be ready for dinner in a few moments he said nothing but went up to his room. He was unusually silent, going to his desk and picking up a little red book that I judged he had bought in New York. Bartley always bought books ; wherever he went he was always finding some item of interest that he would add to his library. But instead of dropping into a chair to look at his new find, he fingered it a moment and then threw it down on the desk. Then he went into the bath, and as I heard the sound of the shower I decided that he was dressing for dinner. I started to take off my clothes, and had laid my evening clothes on the bed, when Bartley called to me.

Going to the door between our rooms, I opened it. He was standing by the desk and was looking at an extremely ugly revolver, which he placed in his pocket when he saw me. To my great surprise, instead of being dressed for dinner, as I expected I would find him, he was wearing a rather old golf suit. He noticed my surprised look at seeing him in this suit, and motioned for me to close the door and come in his room. As I was but partly dressed, I felt more like putting on the rest of my clothes than anything else, but I did as he wished.

"Pelt," he said, "don't dress for dinner to-night.

Put on an old suit and be sure and place a gun in your pocket."

I looked at him in amazement, asking, "What's up?"

For a moment he said nothing, but at last, instead of answering my question, asked another:

"Am I right when I understand that you heard Vance being told to get the things at night, and the suggestion that he knew where they were?"

"That's about the sense of it," I said. "The man told him that he had the key and knew where the things were; but what he was talking about, I don't know."

Bartley nodded his agreement, and then said,

"To-night, Pelt, we are going to break the law, and if we are discovered we will have a hard time explaining what we were doing."

I was still amazed, but he, noticing that I did not seem to understand just what he was driving at, pulled me down on the bed by his side and began to speak in a low voice.

"We are going to break into a house. I don't think we will find any one in it, but still we may. Then we are going to try to get ahead of your friend Vance, and see if we can discover what the 'things' are that you heard he was to get. You say he did not go out last night?"

I shook my head. "I don't think so. Jenkins and myself watched his window till after the light went out, and then we stayed up an hour or so later. I don't think he went out, unless it was after we went to bed. But we don't know, Bartley, what the place is that Vance had the key to. I don't see that there is any way we can find out."

"I think," he said, "that I have an idea whose house Vance has the key to. What he is after is the thing that I want to find out, and I want us to get in the place before he does."

But this did not satisfy me, I had to ask:

"But how do you know whose house it is?"

Before he could answer there came a knock at the door, and when Bartley opened it Williams was standing

there to tell him that dinner was waiting. And so I never had any answer to my question, though a few hours later it answered itself.

After we had finished dinner, Bartley told Williams that we were going out and that we would not be in till late, and when we went out in the air he had a short conversation with Jenkins, who was waiting for him. What he said to Jenkins I did not know, for I had gone to the garage to get a car and a chauffeur. By the time a machine had been run out of the garage, Bartley was with me and we took out seats. The chauffeur turned, waiting to be told where to go. Bartley simply said, "Drive us down to the electric cars."

We boarded the car, and I was curious as to where we were going, but when we reached the road that led to the Golf Club, Bartley signalled the conductor and we got off. It was not yet dark, though it would be in a short while, and I stood for a moment waiting to follow Bartley. Rather to my surprise, he turned towards a private road that led through the golf links to the club. We had walked a few steps around the bend of the road, when he turned out of it, and started across the green back towards Underwood's. Bartley must have understood what I was thinking, for as we walked along he said,

"I presume that you wonder where we are going. We are going to that bungalow next to Underwood's, the one Ransome is staying in. He is presumed to be in New York, and, in fact, I saw him there myself this morning. But I am pretty sure that Ransome must have been the one that was with Vance on the shore. The affected voice, the tone of which I gave you and you said it was like the one you heard, is the one that he uses. We might, of course, have gone right over from the house to-night. But I think it is safer to go this way. If Vance does what I think he will do, he will wait till he thinks every one is away before he goes himself. Seeing us going out in the car will, no doubt, cause him to think that we are away, and I have told Jenkins to get out of sight. There was another reason also why

I came this way. I wanted to get in the house before Vance did, and see if we could discover what he was after. It will be dark by the time we reach it, and I think we will be ahead of him ; that is, if he decided to go in the place himself to-night."

I must confess that I had never for a moment thought that Ransome might have been the other person that I had heard on the beach. But then, I had never heard him speak, and, in fact, had only seen him once or twice. But I wondered why he and Vance should be so friendly and what it was that Vance was to get. I voiced this thought, and Bartley answered,

"I don't know any more than you do, Pelt. I have in my mind a certain idea, but I don't know if it is so. I wonder also what it is that Vance was to get, and why it had to be done so secretly."

"But," I said, "I never knew the two men were friends." It was rather dark by this time, but I saw Bartley smile.

"I did not know that myself. And that is the reason I want to see what is in that house. The fact that the two men never spoke to each other, and that publicly they assumed not to know each other, makes it appear the more significant."

In twenty minutes more we had reached Ransome's bungalow. We walked softly over the grass, pausing by the side of the shingled house. In the darkness we could not distinguish the windows, for the house was dark and silent. The only sounds that we heard were the soft lapping of the surf on the shore below and the sound of the automobiles that passed on the road on the other side of the bungalow.

Bartley led the way to the door, which he tried, and of course found it locked. There were two large windows, one on each side of the door, and only about three feet from the piazza floor. But for some reason or another Bartley did not bother with them but led me off the piazza. I followed him around the side of the house to the back, though it did face the road, which was about fifty feet away, hidden by a hedge. Here Bartley found

a window which he decided would do. He took from his pocket a thin yet strong piece of steel, which he inserted between the frames at the middle of the window. A strong pull and a sudden shove, and the next moment he was shoving the window open.

For a moment we stood outside listening, but there was not a sound. Then Bartley climbed through into the house and I followed him. The next thing that he did was to close the window and then pulled down the shade. I had no idea what room we were in, but as I moved I ran into the edge of a stove and knew that we were in the kitchen. The room was dark, very dark, for the blinds were down at all the windows, and so when the flash of Bartley's light flared up on the floor the light dazzled me for a moment. It lasted but a second, but after he turned it off, he said to me softly, "I judge that we are alone here, and it will do no harm to have the light on." So he turned the light around the room. It was the kitchen; rather small, in fact, with a small gas stove on the nearest side and a table across from it. The table interested Bartley, for a chair was by it, and on its surface was a plate and some other dishes and half a bottle of milk and part of an apple pie. Bartley looked at this with little surprise. Then he took up the bottle and tasted the milk, and then turned his attention to the pie. For a moment after he had done this he stood looking at the table, finally picking up the knife and fork and looking at them carefully. Laying them on the table, he turned to me.

"It looks as if some one has had a meal in here not so many hours ago. That milk is fresh, and that knife and fork have been recently used."

I was puzzled at this, and I could see that Bartley was, for he took his finger off the button of the flash and we were in darkness for a while. I ventured my surprise, and he replied,

"I don't understand it myself. Ransome was in the city this morning, and Jenkins has been watching Vance all day. Yet some one has had a meal here within the last few hours."

Another thought struck me, "Maybe he is somewhere in the house."

"If he is we must take the chance," was all he said.

Again he turned on the light for a moment, and then found the door that led out of the kitchen. With his hand on the knob he again let the light die out, and then slowly, and so softly that I, standing by his side, hardly heard a sound, opened the door. Again we stood, listening, but nothing was heard from the dark room in front of us. After a moment, while we stood with ears strained for the slightest sound, he flashed on the light again, directing its ray of light to the floor, and then around the room, till he had covered all parts of it. Nothing out of the way was to be seen. It was the ordinary dining-room that one found in the better kinds of bungalows, with a heavy dining-table, four chairs and side-board. I noticed, however, that all the curtains at the windows were drawn, heavy dark curtains through which the light could not shine.

We found after a rather slow and careful journey through its various rooms, that no one was in the bungalow. There was, besides the kitchen and the dining-room, a great living-room. This took up about half the house. It was entered from the piazza, a great large room with a fireplace. Among the furniture was a large desk of mission wood, covered with papers, and a smaller desk with a typewriter. Leading out of this living-room, on the side that faced the sea, were two bedrooms—one with a door that stood open, and the other with a doorway closed with draperies only. In the larger of the two bedrooms we found that the bed had not been made, and looked as if some one had been sleeping in it. The other room, which we went into last—the one with the draperies at the door—had only a couch in it and a few chairs.

Bartley spent some time in the living-room. I knew that he, like myself, was wondering what it was that Vance was to come for. There seemed to be no place to hide anything, unless it was back of the many books in the case, and those at the time we did not bother.

There was not even a safe in the house, and hiding-places seemed to be few. But, of course, not knowing what we were to find, we found it a little difficult to decide what would be a good hiding-place.

The search of the living-room had been made by means of Bartley's torch, and had taken a rather longer time than we thought. At the end we had found nothing, and I remember that Bartley was looking over the manuscript by the typewriter, that turned out to be a play, when suddenly the room was in darkness, and Bartley clutched my arm.

"Listen," he said in a whisper.

I listened for a moment, hearing dimly the subdued sound of the surf, and had about made up my mind that it was all that I heard, when I caught the sound of a footstep outside the door on the piazza. For a moment I held my breath, and then again, faintly to be sure, was the sound of some one outside the door.

Bartley clutched my arm and whispered, "Get back of the drapery in the bedroom, and don't make a sound."

I groped my way in the dark through the room to the bedroom, running into all the chairs, or so it seemed, that were between me and the hiding-place. Feeling the draperies brushing my face, I got behind them, as Bartley, who was following me, did the same. We were just in time, for, as we took our places, I heard the door open and some one step into the house.

Bartley drew aside the curtain, which was of heavy velvet and hung down to the floor so that we were well hidden from the sight of any one in the living-room, and looked into the room for a moment. There was some one there, for we had heard the door closed and could now hear steps as he crossed the floor. But we could not see who it was for the room was dark. So we stood there, hearing the sound of the footsteps as the person went across the room, and every moment wondering if he would come into the room where we were. If he did we would be discovered, for there seemed to be no way out of the room but through the living-room. So when a light flashed up, we were relieved.

Through the cracks at the side of the curtain we peered into the living-room. Over by a small desk, or what I presume might be better called a writing table, was a man, with his back turned towards us. In his hand he held a flashlight, which was turned on the desk, whose contents he was examining. For several moments he stood there, then went over to the large desk in the centre of the room and busied himself with something there. What it was we could not see, for his back was towards us, and the flash did not give very much light at the best. But after a moment or so he went back again to the smaller desk, and took from it a tin box. Out of the box he took some papers and stuffed something into his pocket. Though the figure was the same build and height as Vance, yet I was not sure that it was he, for I had not seen his face.

For a few moments he stood by the desk and did not turn, examining no doubt the papers that he had left in the box. It was a rather eerie scene that we were looking upon, for the figure did not move, and over it all was a silence, broken only by the slight rustle of the papers as the man turned the pages. The silence was so marked that suddenly I seemed to hear a sound in the other bedroom, a sound that though very slight yet made me think for a moment that some one had moved in there. Again I listened, and again it seemed as if some one was in the other bedroom, the open door of which was but two feet from us. And then suddenly, so startling that I almost cried out, came a voice, ringing it seemed almost from our very midst, but in reality from the other bedroom,

“ Throw up your hands ! ”

The voice coming so suddenly in the still room, almost made me think that it was we who had been seen, but I knew that this was not so. It had come from the bedroom, which was dark, and the man that had spoken was hidden from sight by the darkness of the room. Bartley touched my arm, as a sign that I must keep still, and we both peered eagerly through the curtain to see what the man in the living-room would do.

At the sound of the voice he dropped what he had in his hand and turned in the direction from which the voice had come. For the first time we saw his face, the heavy glasses, and all. It was indeed Vance, and the surprise on his face was almost laughable.

That the voice and the command to throw up his hands had startled him, there was no doubt. It had startled us, for we had no idea that there was some one else in the house. I had wondered for a moment who it might be, and where the person could have come from, for we had looked in the room and there had been no one there. He had not come in through the door, and how he got in the room was rather puzzling. But if it had startled us, it had done more so to Vance. In fact, so startled was he that he did not obey the command to hold up his hands but looked towards the bedroom door and towards the curtains that hid us. I have no doubt that he was not sure from which room the command had come. But he did not obey it ; in fact, I felt sure that he seemed to know the voice, and he had started to speak when suddenly the room re-echoed with the sound of a revolver shot, a spit of flame came from the door near us, and Vance, with a silly look on his face, half turned around and fell to the floor and did not stir. The man in the bedroom had shot him. This was a development that I doubt if even Bartley was expecting. The first impulse was, of course, to rush out, but we both knew that we must stay where we were, and we did.

I must confess that the next few seconds seemed endless, for after the shot was fired there came no sound from the bedroom. There was but Vance on the floor, one hand doubled under him, and the other holding the torch which had not gone out when he fell. He was still ; in fact, from the time that he fell he did not stir, and above his heart, on his light grey coat, I could see the darkening and enlarging spot of blood. That he was killed, there was no doubt. But who had shot him, and why ? That was the question that ran through my mind as we waited there behind the curtain for the person in the other room to make the first move. So still was it that I could

almost swear that I heard the ticking of my watch in my pocket. The suspense seemed endless, and I wondered if the man would never move. And then we heard him step out from the bedroom and move towards Vance, and then he came within range of the rather feeble ray of light. But to my surprise the first thing that he did was to reach up and turn on the electric light above the desk. Then turning, he bent over Vance, and as the light fell on his face I almost gave a cry, for there before us, bending over the man that he had shot, was Ransome.

I confess that for a moment or so I hardly was able to keep from crying aloud. That before our eyes Vance should be killed was shock enough, but to find out that the person that had done it was Ransome was almost more than one could stand in the way of surprises. But Ransome it was, and then I thought that Bartley must have been wrong when he said that the voice that I heard on the shore speaking to Vance was Ransome's. For that voice had told Vance to come in the house, and had given him the key.

I turned to give a look at Bartley. Luckily for us, the heavy drapery covered almost all the space between the door. It could not be seen through, for it was too thick. But now that the light was turned on in the other room I could make out Bartley's face. His eyes shone and a tense look was on his face, but I could see that he did not seem so surprised as I was. He gave me a sign not to make a sound, and then we drew the curtain aside a little and looked into the living-room.

Ransome was standing above Vance, looking down at him, but in a moment he bent down and felt in his pocket. He took out a long white envelope, held it in his hands a moment, and then placed it back in the pocket from whence he had taken it. And then came the most startling thing of all.

On the desk was a telephone, and to my consternation Ransome picked it up and in a moment got central. Then came the crowning surprise of all when I heard his voice, and I could swear that it was the same voice that I heard on the shore, say,

"Central, give me the Eastwood police station at once." I gave a startled glance at Bartley, but I saw that for some unknown reason he was smiling. But the next second I was listening to the conversation over the telephone. I heard Ransome's voice, pitched high and hurried, and a bit frightened, saying,

"Hullo—hullo! Is this the police station? The Eastwood police station? I have just shot a burglar. Yes, killed him. Who is this speaking? Arthur Ransome. No—Ransome—Ransome. Yes, that's it. I am at the Point. Found the man in my rooms. Yes, a burglar. Where is the cottage? The Rice bungalow, near the Underwood estate. Yes—yes, I will be here. You say you will be right down; all right," and he hung up the receiver, and taking a handkerchief from his pocket wiped his forehead.

What had taken place, the calling up of the police station, I am sure was absolutely unexpected even by Bartley. And it made me think that may be we were both wrong, that it was not Ransome that I had heard, and that he had shot Vance thinking he was a burglar. Vance had not thrown up his hands, that we both had seen, and then the shot had come. That Ransome thought he was a burglar seemed clear, for otherwise he would not have called up the police station.

For several moments after his call he sat silent, and we saw him glance at his hands. Even from our hiding-place we could see that they had blood on them, no doubt from his touching the body to take the envelope from his pocket. As he glanced at his hands, he gave a shudder, and, rising, went out into the dining-room, closing the door, and a second later we heard the sound of running water. He had gone to wash his hands.

As the door closed, Bartley turned to me,

"Quick, Pelt, we must get out of here. Open the window and climb out. I want that envelope that is in Vance's pocket."

I rushed over to the window, unlocked it, threw it open and climbed out, dropping on the ground about five feet beneath. In a second Bartley had secured the

envelope out of Vance's pocket, and was outside with me. Then, without saying a word, he pulled the window down, and taking my hand raced me around the side of the house, out to the road, where any automobile must stop, if they wished to go up to the bungalow. By the side of the road, a little winded, we both dropped to the ground to rest and to wait for the police to come. For a moment neither of us spoke, and then my curiosity got the better of me; I turned to Bartley, and asked,

"What do you think of it?—it was the queerest thing ever happened to me."

His reply came back short and quick, almost stunning me by the thing he said. He answered,

"That was the cleverest planned murder that I ever heard of."

CHAPTER XVI

SPILLED TOBACCO AND STOLEN PEARLS

"ONE of the cleverest planned murders that I have ever heard of," repeated Bartley. "You heard Ransome tell the police that he had killed a burglar. By this he at the very start throws suspicion away from himself. Whoever heard of a man that had just killed a person, murdered him, ever telling the police? The police will find Vance dead, in Ransome's house. They will see that his desk has been opened and things taken, some of which they will find in his pocket. Ransome will tell them that he shot at the burglar and killed him. He can't say that he does not know who it was, but will say that he did not know till after he had shot him. He will be able to say that he did not know Vance, except by sight."

I broke in on him by saying,

"But suppose I tell of hearing them on the beach?"

Bartley gave a short laugh.

"Suppose you do, what of it? Do you think any jury would convict a man simply because you say you heard a voice like his? The fact that you heard him, and I am sure, Pelt, just as sure as I am that we are sitting here, that you did hear him, that it was Ransome talking, will not amount to anything. For no jury, as I said, would convict a man with simply that to connect the two men."

He paused as he glanced up the road, but there was no car in sight, and he took a cigarette from his case and lighted it, the tip glowing in the dark. Then he continued,

"Now, Ransome will say he found a man in his house and shot him for a burglar. Who can prove that is not so. We saw the affair, but what can we say? Simply that he asked him to throw up his hands, and that when

he refused he shot him. All Ransome has to do is stick to that story, and no one on earth can prove that it is not true. But it won't be true, Pelt. It's murder. He knew Vance, he told him to go to the house, and he killed him, because he wished for some season to get rid of him. I have no doubt that it was all skilfully planned, the way to get Vance there, and all. And there is no way that you can disprove the story that he will tell."

"But how would he know what night Vance would be there, and where was he while we were in the house. I mean before Vance came."

Rising to his feet, Bartley answered, "I can't answer the first, maybe he told him not to go till to-night. As for the second, we came in the back way. He was probably hiding down the road, until he saw Vance pass. I think he got in the window, and if he did he must have been in the house before and left the window unlocked."

He might have said more, but just at this moment an automobile drove up and stopped before us. In the dim light I recognized the uniform of the police. There were three in the car, and Bartley went out to the road to speak to them. At his voice, one of them came over to him, and flashed a light in his face, then recognizing him, said,

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Bartley. We were just called down here by a telephone call. A man killed a burglar. Strange it took place next house to Underwood's."

Bartley made no reply to this, but took the officer a little aside, far enough so that the others could not hear him, then he said,

"Officer, I am going to ask a favour of you. I am very much interested in what I may find in that house. I wish it were possible that you could get the man that shot the burglar away from it for an hour or so."

The police officer glanced at him, then smiled. He seemed to comprehend what was in Bartley's mind, and laughed.

"I see. Got something against him yourself. I'll tell you what I can do. This man says he shot a burglar. If I find it's as he says, I can bluff him that he must go up to

the station and give security that he won't run away. The chief did not come down, and will want to see the man anyway. And I will have to leave a man at the house till the coroner comes. So if while he is there you want anything, I expect you can have it."

Bartley laughed, and said,

"That will be all I need. And you tell the chief I may have something for him."

So with this they walked back to the car, where the officer invited Bartley and myself to go to the bungalow with him. I knew that this was what Bartley intended to do anyway, knowing that he wished to see how Ransome would bear himself, and what he would say, and above all how he would explain what had happened.

As we came in front of the bungalow, we found that it was aflame with lights. It seemed as if Ransome had turned on all the lights in the house for the windows were ablaze. Before we reached the piazza we saw that some one was on it, walking back and forth, from one end of it to the other. And when we reached it, we saw that it was Ransome, and that the front door was open.

That he was relieved to see the police, one could tell. He greeted them, as a man does when, after being away from all other society but his own for weeks, he sees his first fellow man. He started rather eagerly to explain to them what had happened, but the officer told him to wait a while and entered the house. If he was surprised to see Bartley and myself, he did not show it, nodding to us in a way that showed he was excited. But with all, excited as he was, he had control of himself.

We walked with the officer to the body, lying on the floor near the desk. It was in the same position as when we saw him fall. The arm bent under the body, the eyes wide and staring. Over the heart the grey suit was dark with blood that had come from the wound by his heart. His face, with the eyes wide open, had upon it a look of surprise, as if in that last second of life he saw that death was before him, and was surprised and startled at what he saw.

Death at any time is not a pleasant thing to see, and

violent death has something about it that awes every one. So for a while we stood looking at the body, and no one spoke. Meanwhile Ransome was not still a moment. First he would brush against Bartley or myself, and look at the body ; then he would move away, only to come back to the group around Vance. When the police officer at length spoke to him, he was by the door. The officer turned to him.

"Tell me how this took place," he said.

Ransome came eagerly over to us, and said hurriedly.

"I'd better start at the beginning. I had come from New York, and when I got to the house I went up on the piazza intending to unlock the door. As I started to put the key in the lock, I saw a light flash in the room. You can see that the upper part of the door is glass. I looked and saw a man at my desk. I did not see who it was, but I went round to the front of the house, and climbed in a window. It was in my bedroom, and I got my gun that I keep under the mattress. I then went to the door, and stood there a moment, and then asked the man to throw up his hands. He did not do so, but I did not intend to shoot him, but in my excitement the gun went off, and he fell. Then I came and turned on the light and then called up the station."

He stopped and wiped his face with his handkerchief. He was trembling a little and had become very excited. The officer looked at him for several moments before he spoke, finally asking, as he pointed to Vance,

"Did you know this man ?"

Ransome was silent for a moment. I was watching his face, which I thought reddened a little at the question, but he answered coolly enough,

"I did not know him personally, but I know who he is. He was Mr. Underwood's private secretary. I had seen him once or twice, but did not know him to speak to."

The officer was startled at discovering that the dead man at his feet was Underwood's private secretary. I did not understand why he had not recognized him, for I thought he must have heard his testimony at the inquest, but I found later that he was not in the room

while the inquest had been going on. But I could see that he could not understand why Vance should be found in the bungalow, for he asked Ransome,

"What do you think he was after?"

Ransome did not hesitate, replying,

"I have no idea. He was at my desk. When I drew my gun and told him to throw up his hands, I did not see his face and did not know who it was. He turned then, and just about the same time I recognized who it was the gun went off. I did not intend to shoot him."

This I felt sure was not true. There had been at least a minute after Vance had turned, before he was shot. The time was long enough for Bartley and I to recognize him, and I am sure that Ransome had. In fact, it was my idea that Vance had recognized Ransome, and that fearing no harm from him he had not thrown up his hands. I took no stock in the story that the gun had gone off, and that Ransome had not intended to shoot.

After this, the officer asked Ransome for the gun, and it was given him. He then asked him to show where he was standing at the time Vance was killed. Ransome went to the bedroom and stood just inside the door, and showed us how it all happened. The officer said nothing, and after going back and taking a look at Vance again, turned to Ransome.

"Well, Mr. Ransome," he said, "you will have to go up to the city with me and see the chief. I think it will only be a formality, but he will want to see you, so I will take you up with me and leave a man here till we get the coroner down."

Ransome was not pleased at this. He turned around, and when he faced us again his fingers were playing with the button of his coat, which he twisted till he almost tore it off. In a nervous voice he asked,

"Am I under arrest?"

The officer looked at him with a bit of surprise.

"Goodness, no. We don't arrest a man for killing a burglar that he finds in his house. But you have got to tell the story to the chief; that's why I am taking you up. I don't see that you will have any trouble about the thing."

This seemed to satisfy him, but I could see that he did not care to go. But several moments afterwards the officer went out to his car, and Ransome with him. Both Bartley and myself walked out with them, for Bartley did not care to let him see that we were to stay in the house. We went out to the road and watched the car out of sight. Then we turned back toward the bungalow. As we walked towards it, Bartley said to me,

"It's what I said, Pelt. Murder all right. The officer never thought to ask him how it was there was a window all open for him to get in by, when he must have locked all of them when he went to New York. But he told a great story, and I don't see how any one can overthrow it."

"But suppose we tell what we saw?" I suggested.

"Well, suppose we do," answered Bartley. "What can we tell? Simply that we did see Vance at the desk, that we heard the command for him to throw up his hands, and saw him shot. Why, in a sense the story would only prove that Ransome had told the truth."

By this time we had reached the piazza, and I said,

"And yet you think he did not tell the truth?"

At the door Bartley turned.

"Yes, I say he did not tell the truth. That is, he told the truth as far as he went. But he did not tell all. He knew that Vance was to be in the house, he recognized him, and, despite that, he killed him. When he says he did not know Vance, he lied. It was murder, and one that I doubt if it can be proven against him."

We had entered the living-room by this time, to find a young policeman in a chair, whose duty it was to wait till the coroner came. He evidently had been told that Bartley was to look the house over, for he greeted us by saying, "I wondered when you would come back."

After a few words with him, we started to search the house. I had no idea what we were after, and yet I seemed to feel that we would find something. And in the first room we looked over we did. It came while we were looking through the drawers in the dresser in the bedroom. While turning over a lot of jewellery, pins,

cuff links, stones and the like, I came across something that made me call to Bartley. He came over to my side, asking what I had found. It was nothing startling, only two cuff links, and a watch fob, and for a moment he looked at them, and then at me. I presume he thought I had lost my senses. But the cuff links and the fob were shaped like the head of a cat, with black whiskers painted on the queer gold face, the very same design that I had seen on the tiepin that I had found at Mrs. Severance's after the robbery. I told him about the pin, but he did not seem to understand, for he said,

"Well, what about it?"

"Only that these are the same design," I answered.

He snatched them out of my hands, and examined them, turning to say,

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely," I answered. "I wager the pin belonged to the same set."

Then I told him where I had found the pin, and he agreed with me that it must have belonged to the person that had committed the robbery. So we stood silent a while, looking at the cuff links and the fob. After a while Bartley said,

"You know this proves, Pelt, that our friend Ransome must have been mixed up in that robbery. I have wondered where he got his money."

The finding of those things set us eagerly hunting for something that might be more definite. But we found nothing, except in a drawer there was a booklet which contained a map of the Point. It was a map which gave every road, and every cottage at the Point. As we looked at it, we found that a circle had been drawn around several of the houses on the map. And when we came to look up the key to it, we discovered that around the house of the Severances there had been drawn a circle, and also around the other house where a robbery had taken place. There were several other houses that had circles around them also. I think we both had the same thought. The finding of the map marked at the

places where the robberies had taken place was significant. Bartley voiced my feelings by saying,

"Well, there are the places where the robberies took place, and I presume that the others are places where they would have taken place in the future. It begins to look a little interesting."

But after that we found nothing of any importance in the bedroom, nor in the other one. In fact, a careful search of the living-room brought nothing to light, though we even looked back of the books that were in the cases. The policeman aided us in the search, though he did not know any more than we did what we were looking for. It was true that Bartley did take several letters that he found in the desk, and after giving them a glance placed them in his pocket. But aside from that he seemed to find nothing.

I wondered just what he expected to find, and asked, but received the reply that he was not sure himself, though if Ransome had been mixed up in the robberies he did venture that we might find some of the stolen things.

After a long search we gave it up. Bartley stood by the large desk and gave me a rather discouraged look, saying, "It looks as if we were out of luck."

Just then I reached across the desk for my hat, which I had placed there when we came in. There was a large jar of tobacco on the desk, a glass jar that must have held two pounds, and it was filled to the brim with tobacco. In some way my arm fell against it, and it was knocked off the desk to the floor, spilling the tobacco. I bent to pick the jar up, and started to fill my hands with the tobacco that was on the floor, with the idea of putting it back in the jar. But the first handful that I picked up caused me to forget all about putting the jar back. For mixed up in the tobacco, the soft stones glistening in the light, was a pearl necklace.

I gave a cry and straightened up, the necklace in my hand. Bartley gave one look at me, his eyes falling on the object that was in my hand, and he took it from me. It was a pearl necklace, of about thirty stones, and had

SPILLED TOBACCO AND STOLEN PEARLS 161

been almost before our eyes all the time. Bartley after a while placed it on the desk and turned to me.

"What a clever place to hide a thing like that. You know that they say the safest place to hide anything is in plain sight. You remember that story of Poe's? And who would think of looking in a jar of tobacco that was on a desk in front of you? You said, I think, Mrs. Severance had a pearl necklace stolen?"

"Yes, and that seems to be it. She described it and that looks like it."

Bartley gave a little grin.

"Well, I believe that we have something against Ransome on that."

He turned to the officer.

"Call up the station and tell them to hold Ransome for the Severance robbery. Tell the chief I have the necklace, and that I will give him all the details in the morning."

The policeman nodded, though he seemed a bit stunned at what had taken place, and I doubt if he understood much of what he had seen. But he did know, of course, about the robbery, but he had seen the necklace taken from the tobacco on the floor.

As we left the house Bartley gave me a cigar, lighted one himself, and then suddenly laughed. I saw nothing to laugh at, and told him so, and he simply laughed again, and said,

"What a strange evening it has been. I was just thinking that, after all, I made a good guess regarding that conversation that you heard at the shore. I thought, when you told me, that Vance and Ransome must have been mixed up in something crooked, what, I did not know."

"Do you think," I asked, "that Vance was mixed up in the robberies?"

"He must have been mixed up in some way. At any rate he must have known something about them. I have an idea that was why he was shot, because he knew too much about something, and Ransome wanted to shut his mouth."

I must admit that in the last hour or so I had decided that Vance knew something about the death of Underwood. I had not gone so far as to say to myself that he was the murderer, but I thought that he knew more than he had told. He had not told the truth about his going out on the night of the murder, or about several other things. And I had begun to think that he might have had as many chances as any one else to kill Underwood. So while walking along the shore, I said as much to Bartley.

"In a sense what you say is true," he replied. "I do think he knew more than he told us, but he had no sufficient reason to kill Underwood, nothing sufficient to gain by so doing. And for that matter, Pelt, I don't think Ransome killed him."

CHAPTER XVII

THE LADY LOSES HER TEMPER

THE first thing that I heard the next morning when I went down to breakfast was the news that Mrs. Underwood was coming back. In fact, when Williams had told me all about it, with a face that showed his delight, I found that Mrs. Underwood and Robert would be at the house within an hour or so. They had left New York the night before and had come down on the boat. The butler did not seem much interested in the coming of his mistress, but all his joy centred around the fact that Robert was to return. Yet in his conversation I could see that he was a little afraid that the boy might be arrested for the murder of his father.

It was this last thought that caused me after breakfast to take a piece of paper and set down the various persons that might have been connected with the crime. I wondered what had become of Jenkins because I had not seen him since the night before. So after breakfast I went out on the sea wall, and had Williams bring me a little table and a chair. I wanted to be out in the air, where I could see the ocean.

The writing of these notes took about an hour, and when they were finished I admitted to myself that the work was very slight. The only real evidence pointed to the son, and even that to my mind was slight. In all, I decided that, so far as I was concerned, I knew hardly any more about it, nor were we nearer a solution than we were the afternoon Sullivan had come over to the golf course and told us that Underwood was dead.

After I had done this, I walked around the house to see if I could find Bartley, but did not find any sight of him. So I went back and finding the morning paper looked over the news.

Several times while I was reading the paper, Williams drifted past me, and I began to wonder what was troubling him. So when after a while he came around the house, I hailed him, and asked him what the matter might be. He was nervous and tired, but he had looked both tired and nervous for the past few days. But he answered me by saying that he could not understand why Mrs. Underwood and Robert had not arrived. He said,

"You know, sir, the telegram said that they would be here about eight-thirty. The boat docks at New London about six, and they should have been here an hour ago. I really fear something is wrong."

He actually did seem to have this feeling, and I comforted him by saying that maybe the boat was late, or that the train had broken down, or something like that had happened. But it did not seem to reassure him, for he went away after saying, "But it's queer, sir. They should have been here."

He had no sooner got out of sight, than I saw Bartley coming up the long steps from the shore. It was a warm day, and he looked hot. I wondered where he had been, but did not ask him, for I knew better than that. He was wearing a white flannel suit, and finding a chair on the piazza he brought it down to my side. My only remark as he came near was to say that it was hot. He grinned, and replied,

"Oh, not so bad. It's cool on the water."

I looked at him, thinking it was an absurd answer, and he surmised what was in my mind and, picking up the paper, said, "I have just been over to Stonington."

Now Stonington was across the bay, the inclosed, landlocked branch of the sea and river. From all parts of the Point, which was on rather high ground, the white houses and church steeples of the town of Stonington could be seen. It was only three miles away, but the boat only ran every two hours, and I wondered just how he had got over. But as if he was reading my thoughts, he leaned back in the chair, and started to talk.

"I went down this morning to take a short row before breakfast, and Captain Brown, the man we rent our

boats of, told me something interesting. It seems he had a boat stolen the night of the murder. It was about midnight. He happened to be down on his dock. He said that the reason for his being there so late was the fact that he had taken a party out in his boat in the afternoon, and that the wind had died out, they not being able to return till late at night. So just as he was about to close up, a man came and wanted to hire a rowing boat. The captain thought it was rather late for such a thing, but the man said that he wished to row over to a yacht that was in the bay and see a friend. So after some talk he agreed to let him have a boat, and told him when he returned to the dock to tie it there. But the next morning when he went down to the dock, there was no rowing boat there. During the day he rowed over to the only yacht that had been in the bay, thinking he could find something about his rowing boat there, but they told him that no one had rowed to the boat during the night. So for a few days he decided the boat was stolen, but last night he received word that it was across the bay, at the dock at Stonington. So I went over there with him, and it turned out to be his boat.

"It may be just a coincidence," continued Bartley, "but it's true that the boat was let on the night of the murder. I figured that if Underwood was killed at the time we think, it would have been possible to have gone from the house here, and to be at the dock just at the time the man was. Then again, he had no intention of going to any yacht. There was but one in the bay, and he did not go there. He wanted to go to Stonington, and he rowed over, and left the boat at the dock. The dock, you know, is only about a hundred yards from the station. Now the fact he took the trouble to row over there at that hour of night is significant. He could have taken a taxi, or even the last electric car. But he did not do any of those things, because he did not wish to have any one see him. And then, Pelt, over there at Stonington there was a train at 1.20 a.m. for New York, and one for Boston at 1.25 a.m. The switchmen at the station crossing tell me that no one got on the train for

New York, but that a man did get on the train that went to Boston."

"Could Captain Brown identify the man?" I asked.

"I am afraid not. He was in his boathouse with a lantern, and the man stood outside the door and did not come in. It was rather dark outside, and Brown did not see him very well. Evidently he did not wish to be seen."

Bartley might have said more, but just then I heard a motor drive up to the house. Bartley gave me a questioning look, and I said that I thought it must be Mrs. Underwood and Robert returning. He half started to rise to his feet, but changed his mind, sinking back in his chair. I listened for a moment or so, to see if I could discover who it was in the car. But though I heard the sound of voices yet I could not distinguish them, and turned after a while to watch a woman who was swimming out beyond the life line. Suddenly Bartley said, "What's the matter with Williams?"

I turned quickly and looked towards the house. Williams was running towards us, his face white, and his whole figure expressing terror. As he came nearer, but while yet a little way from us, he tried to speak, but though his lips seemed to move yet he was unable to make a sound. But in a moment he was at our side, his hands trembling, the lips twitching nervously, and in his eyes a look of fear. For a while I thought he would never speak, and then he gasped out,

"Mr. Bartley, oh, Mr. Bartley, they have just arrested Robert!"

He tried to say more, but broke down and was unable to continue. Bartley rose to his feet and put his arm around the old man's shoulder. I could see that the grief of Williams had touched him, and his voice was tender as he said,

"Now, Williams, don't worry about that. I tell you that the young man did not kill his father, and I will have him back in a few days at the most."

These words seemed to reassure the butler, but at that he was a little doubtful for he said in a broken voice,

"But the disgrace of it. Why, all his life they will say he was arrested for killing his father!"

Bartley, with his arm still around the butler, answered,

"Listen, Williams. This won't be as bad as you think. For we will prove that he had nothing to do with the crime, and they will have to say they made a sad mistake in arresting him. It's even better for him that he was arrested, for if they did not, and never found the murderer, some people would always say that the boy knew something about it, but that he had money enough to escape arrest. But now when they have to discharge him, and I swear, Williams, that they will have to, no one will be able to say that. They will say that it was another mistake of the police."

Just what might have been said to this rather curious argument of Bartley's, I never discovered. For we heard Mrs. Underwood's voice from the front of the house, calling the butler, calling him in a decidedly angry tone.

He straightened himself, wiped his eyes, and we followed him to the front of the house. There we found one of the chauffeurs in a big car trying to get the baggage in order. Mrs. Underwood was standing in the hall, and Williams went up to her, we close behind.

She was angry, her face flushed and around her mouth there was a hard line, one that spoke of a woman that was determined to have her own way. For a second she looked at Williams, her eyes flashing. Then all at once she cried in a high pitched voice :

"What do you mean by going away like that, and leaving me with all the baggage? You seem to think that because you have been in the family so many years you can do what you wish. I am not going to allow anything like that. You are only a servant, you know, and I can easily find another butler."

Williams looked at her in surprise, but that he was pained and hurt by what she said was easy to see. And I thought that he should be. Though he was the butler, yet he had been more than that to Mr. Underwood. In fact, he filled a place in the family, the family that he had watched over for many years, that he loved, I judged,

more than anything else in the world. To be told that he was but a servant, and that she could secure another butler, was something that he had never heard in all the years he had been with the Underwoods.

I myself decided that Mrs. Underwood had gone too far. At least her voice, her anger, and above all the uncalled-for remarks that she had made to the old butler, were hardly the things that one would have expected in a woman of her position.

But the old man did not show any surprise when he answered her, though he did draw himself up with a greater dignity, and said,

"I am very sorry that I displeased you. I was so overcome at hearing that Mr. Robert was arrested that I forgot my duties for a moment. I only went and told Mr. Bartley."

Evidently this last remark did not please Mrs. Underwood, for she turned on him hastily and said,

"You should have remembered that I was waiting here. Robert's being arrested, I think Mr. Bartley could have discovered without your aid when the proper time came."

She glanced at Bartley as she said this, and there was a sneer on her lips. Then she turned and went back into the house, but only went as far as the drawing-room, where her maid seemed to be waiting for her coat and hat.

Bartley turned and gave me a curious smile, but said nothing. Williams went out to the car and started to bring in the bags, placing them on the floor by our side. While doing this, Mrs. Underwood returned to the door, and as Williams came up with another bag she said to him, "After you have taken the bags to the room, I wish you would go over to Mr. Ransome's cottage and tell him that I wish to see him."

Then for the first time it struck me that I had not bothered to find out if the servants knew anything about the killing of Vance. In fact, I had been so engaged in writing in my notebook, that I myself had forgotten for a while what had taken place the night before. But from

Williams' bearing, and the manner in which he took her command, I made up my mind that at least he did not know that Vance had been killed by Ransome.

So I was a little surprised when Bartley, without waiting for Williams to say more than "I will," suddenly broke in on him, and turning to Mrs. Underwood said,

"I fear, Mrs. Underwood, it will do no good for him to take such a message over to the next house."

She turned on him in a rage, angry that he should answer her, and said,

"I fail to see, Mr. Bartley, that it is any business of yours."

Bartley gave me a wink, but his face was serious, as he said,

"But Mr. Ransome is not there; in fact, he is in jail."

"In jail," she echoed in consternation, her face flushing. "What is he in jail for?"

The look on Bartley's face deepened, his lips were almost a tight line as he shot back,

"For murder."

I gave a start, and almost spoke, but, receiving a warning glance from Bartley, held my words. But I was startled at his answer, for I knew that although Bartley was sure that Ransome had killed Vance, or rather murdered him, yet that was not the reason he was in jail. But Mrs. Underwood startled me more than Bartley's words had done, by the effect that his statement made on her. The anger that she had been showing vanished, and the flush in her face faded away till she was pale. Her eyes looked a question that she seemed unable to speak, and she appeared to be seized with a sudden terror. Leaning against the side of the door for support, she placed one hand over her heart, and gasped out,

"I don't understand. Why, I am sure he did not do it." Her voice was low and hesitating as she started, but as she went on it gradually raised till she was almost shrieking out the words. "I know he did not do it. I don't see how you—" But here she got control of herself, and stopped as if fearing what she might say.

Bartley was observing her closely, and the look on his

face was hard to analyse. In it was a little of triumph, and also a little of wonder. He waited a moment for her to continue, and finding that she would say no more, said,

"He shot Vance last night."

Her eyes opened wide at this, and the look of fear vanished from her face. In a moment she had so recovered that she was her old self, and was able to say,

"Shot Mr. Vance?"

"Yes," replied Bartley, "shot Vance. He found Vance in his cottage, and thinking he was a burglar shot and killed him."

If this statement surprised her, she did not show it, asking,

"But if that is the case, they can't hold him for murder."

In fact, she seemed relieved at this thought, for she smiled, but Bartley seemed not to be showing her any mercy, for he continued,

"Maybe not, but they are holding him now for the robbery that took place at Mrs. Severance's house the other night."

This statement seemed to anger her, for she said haughtily,

"But that is absurd."

Bartley smiled. "Maybe, but they found the pearl necklace that was stolen from Mrs. Severance in Ransome's house."

This seemed the last straw. She made no reply, giving us a rather appealing look, and then turned and went into the house.

Bartley turned to me, with a little grin. "Pelt, we must run up and see that district attorney."

So out we went to the garage, and I took the car, and climbing in we started for the town. I was driving and Bartley said nothing till we had turned on the main road, and then he turned to me with a laugh.

"The lady was a bit peevish this morning." I agreed with him, and he added, "Her remarks to Williams were ardly the thing one would expect a woman in her position to make. They were uncalled for and cruel."

"And she did not seem to care very much about Robert's arrest."

"No," he replied, "that did not worry her any, but she was upset when she heard about Ransome. I think she thought for a moment that he had been arrested for the death of her husband. That's what I wanted her to think, and she did."

"Yes," I replied, "she did seem frightened when she heard that Ransome had been arrested; far more concerned over it than she was about the boy, and it seems odd."

"That is true," answered Bartley, "and you are right when you say it looks odd."

Nothing more was said after this, Bartley lighting a cigar, and sitting back to enjoy the ride. In a few moments we were in the town, running down the long street lined with elm trees, and stopping at last at the large granite court house, which was across from the park. But when we went into the building we were told that District Attorney Sullivan would not be back for thirty minutes, and Bartley then suggested that we run up to the jail and see Underwood.

The jail was a little red building, with the police station in the basement. The first floor was used, I think, for the district court. The chief was not in, but there was a police officer lounging about, who at first did not wish to allow us to see the boy. But after some little argument, when he found out who we were, he gave in.

We followed him back of the two rooms used for an office to the cells. They were as bad as any I have ever seen. To start with, they were all in the basement, half underground. The only light that came in was from a window, and a small one at that, which was in the corridor, and the cells were small and damp and smelt musty. Bartley gave a gesture of disgust when he saw them.

Underwood was in the last cell. I had expected to find him disheartened but was glad to see that he greeted us with a smile, even if it was a bit forced. He looked worn out, and showed that the ordeal had effected him, but he was not as disheartened as I had expected that

he would be. Bartley, after the cell door was opened, went in, and threw his arm around the young fellow. The boy almost broke down for a minute, but recovered himself as Bartley said, "Don't worry over this, Underwood. We will have you out in a little while."

What was said after that I don't know, for Bartley motioned me to get the police officer away, and I saw that he wished to talk with the boy. So I bribed him with a cigar, one of Bartley's, and knowing that it was a far better one than he ever smoked before, thought that maybe he might be persuaded to go into the office and talk. He did, and for thirty minutes we talked of this and that, till Bartley appeared, the officer then going back to lock Underwood in his cell. Giving the policeman several more cigars and thanking him, we went again to the court house.

This time we found Sullivan in, and with him the chief of police. They had been engaged in a rather animated conversation, for the face of the chief was red, but both greeted us with evident relief.

"Mr. Bartley," said Sullivan, "I have been telling the chief that I am not so sure but what he made a mistake in arresting Underwood this morning. I know the evidence seems to connect him with the crime, but I doubt if it is serious enough to cause him to be arrested."

The chief flushed at these words, and broke in, "I tell you he is the murderer, and I can prove it."

Bartley suddenly turned on him, with a disgusted air.

"Chief, if you have no more proof than you had when you were talking to me last night, you will never convict him in the world. You police chiefs are all alike. All you want to do is make an arrest, and so you take the first man that you think you have anything against."

This did not please the chief, and his face flushed as Bartley spoke. I judge it angered him for he sneered,

"Some of you detectives think you know everything."

Bartley looked at him a moment, while a smile overspread his face.

"Let me tell you something, chief. I advised you yesterday to leave the young fellow alone. You did not

do it. I can prove that he did not know a thing about the murder. And then, if he takes my advice, he will bring suit against the town and against you personally for his arrest. And when he gets through, 'good-bye,' chief."

The chief, I could see, had not thought about the last statement, and it did not please him. He turned nervously, and said,

"Well, we will see," and after a good-bye to Sullivan, in which we were not included, he went out.

The attorney turned to Bartley with a smile.

"If you are right, when you say that you will be able to prove that Underwood had nothing to do with the crime, then the chief will have a hard time of it. He don't know any more than he should, and feels the importance of his office, and I think that you have him scared a bit.

Bartley agreed with him, and then entered into a long talk about Ransome. He told Sullivan how we had seen Vance killed and that he thought there was no doubt that it was murder. The attorney was rather startled at this, and told us that the inquest had been held that morning, and that they had brought in a verdict of justifiable homicide. He added that our statement should have been given the jury, and was a little angry because Bartley had not told him about it before. But Bartley informed him that there was no way in which they could prove that Ransome had murdered Vance. He said that for himself he was sure that he did, but that if Ransome knew at this time that he had seen the shooting he would be on his guard, and that they might never get any further with the case. By keeping still it might be that something would turn up. After a long talk, in which the story was gone over a dozen times, Sullivan agreed with Bartley that there was no way of proving that Ransome had murdered Vance in cold blood.

He told us that Ransome had said that he did not know Vance, that is not to speak to him, though he had seen him at Underwood's. He said that Ransome stuck to the story that he did not intend to kill him, or even

shoot him. But that when he asked him to throw up his hands he did not, but turned and started towards the door where Ransome was, and that in his excitement he shot him.

Bartley broke in on him here to say,

" You see, Mr. Sullivan, it's a good story, there is not a jury in the world that would convict a man that told that story. Not when all there is against it is simply what Pelt heard, and what I have told you. But at that he murdered Vance."

The attorney agreed with him, and then went on to tell us what Ransome had said when he was told that he had been held for the robbery. He had not seemed startled, but had simply said that he knew nothing about it, that if they had found the pearls there they must have been placed there by Vance. He brought forward the theory that Vance had used his house for a hiding-place for the things that he had taken, and had gone there that night to get them back. Besides saying this and asking for a lawyer, he had refused to talk. Bartley listened till the attorney was through, and then said,

" That is not a bad yarn, Sullivan. It sounds good, and until we dig up something more against him would, I think, get him off before a jury. It does give him a good reason for Vance's being in the house. But there is no doubt that he is mixed up in those robberies, and I want you to keep him locked up a while, and to see that he does not have any bail."

Sullivan agreed to this, and for some little while after they talked golf, and then we left him. As we climbed into the car by the sidewalk. Bartley gave a yawn, and turning to me said,

" Well, Pelt, let's go back to the house. I am going to have a little talk with Mrs. Underwood, and when you hear what I have to say you will get a new sensation."

In my eagerness I asked, " What is it ? "

He gave a laugh. " You will have to wait an hour or so, and then you will find out."

CHAPTER XVIII

▲ WILL THAT WAS NOT DRAWN

BUT it turned out that I was not to hear what Bartley had to say to Mrs. Underwood for some hours. For when we reached the house, dinner was ready, and after dinner, when Bartley asked for Mrs. Underwood, he was told that she had gone up to town. He said nothing just then, but as we went up to our room he turned on the stairs to say, "She has gone up to see Ransome."

I had surmised that myself, and asked, "Do you think she will see him?"

We had reached his room, and entering, he closed the door before he spoke. "No, I left word that I did not want any one to see him."

He went over to the window, paused there a moment, and then flung himself down in a chair, giving a weary sigh. After a while he found his pipe, and after packing it with his mixture, the darkest and strongest tobacco that I ever have tackled, he contented himself for a while in blowing out great rings of smoke. Seeing he was not in the least like talking, I went into my own room and changed my clothes for a light, silk summer suit, it having turned very warm. When I went back into his room, he was still smoking, but, to my surprise, took up the conversation where he had left it some time before.

"I think," he said, "Mrs. Underwood will come back a little more nervous than when she went up to the town. She will be pulled two ways, by fear, and a desire to know just what we have against Ransome." He was still a moment, then said in a musing voice, "There must be something that causes this great interest that she has in Ransome."

For a while he sat, with a puzzled look on his face, and I knew that he was endeavouring to satisfy in his

mind why Mrs. Underwood should be interested in Ransome, and why she was so frightened when he said that he had been arrested for murder. I chuckled to myself when I thought of her trip to the city, and the way she must feel when she was told that they would not allow her to see him. And then Bartley with a sudden "By Jove" got hurriedly to his feet and went over and pulled a long white envelope out of his grip. I started at his tone and wondered what had caused it. He came over to me and said, "Look at this," throwing over to me the envelope. "I forgot to show it to you this morning, and it was what I got out of Vance's pocket last night."

I had forgotten also that Bartley had taken something from the pocket of Vance when Ransome went into the kitchen to wash the blood from his hands. I opened the envelope, but there saw nothing in it but a mass of bills, bound with a white strip of paper. The money looked as if it had not been used, and when I took it from the envelope I saw that there were three piles of fifty-dollar bills, new money that evidently had not been used. In another moment it rushed over me what Vance had said about the three thousand dollars that Underwood had received from the bank the afternoon before he was killed. I glanced at Bartley, giving a questioning look. He seemed to know what was in my mind, and answered,

"Yes, Pelt, that is what I found. It's the missing three thousand dollars. You can see that the series number on the bills are those that were given you at the bank."

I gave another glance at the money, which I was holding in my hands, but the one thing that had thus far been discovered as a motive for the crime.

"I don't know any more than you do," Bartley continued, "as to what they were doing over at Ransome's. But one thing is clear. Vance knew that they were there. Now it seems that Ransome must have known that also. Vance knew just where to go for them, knew what envelope they were in. It was an awkward way to divide up the loot, but it served Ransome's purpose

and enabled him to get rid of Vance. But why did Ransome return the envelope to Vance's pocket, and then 'phone for the police? We are getting closer to things. We have connected at least this money with some one, and we may be nearer the solution than we think."

I could only say to this, "It's the missing money all right."

Bartley nodded cheerfully. "No doubt of it. I think we will have to make that chap talk."

"Talk," I echoed. "But how can you do it?"

He made a gesture with his hands.

"Oh, I think we can find a way. If Ransome is the kind of a chap I think that he is, we will make a trade with him. He is like all his type, brave enough outwardly, but in truth a spineless coward. We will let him stay up in the cell a while, allow no one to see him, drop a few hints once in a while into his mind. After he has been alone in the cell for a few days he will get anxious, and then begin to wonder just how deep he is involved, and then he will begin to think of himself. But I think that in the end we can get him to talk."

But as I looked at the money, another thought struck me.

"Well, they can't say Robert took the money. This should be enough to clear him."

Bartley agreed.

"Oh, yes, it will help. I know he is innocent, but a jury might ask for more proof than this. They would remember the quarrel and all the rest. But I am positive that he is innocent. Anyway, the finding of the money shows that he did not kill his father for that."

Then, as if tired of the whole discussion, he took the bills from my hands and placed them in the envelope, placing it in the inside pocket of his coat. Then his whole air changed. He became like a man that had never heard of a murder in his life, and looking at his watch, said,

"Well, Mrs. Underwood is not here yet. Let's go down to the library and look at the books. I have wanted to do that since we came, and I only got a peek at it the other day."



We spent nearly an hour in the library, and Bartley found one thing that particularly fascinated him. It was a bookcase that stood all by itself, standing away from the wall, that contained about two hundred books. They were all bound alike, in a little volume, with dark red leather bindings, that one could tell at a glance were many years old. Bartley sank down on his knees before this case, and took a volume out, then another, and then turned the case till he had seen all of its contents. When he finished he turned to me with a sigh. It was a clear sigh of envy.

"Pelt, here is something that you will perhaps never see in another library in your life."

He handed one of the volumes to me, and I opened it. It was in French, dated about the beginning of the century, the paper as white as the day they were printed. The quaint cuts, some of them a wee bit scandalous to the modest soul, were old wood cuts. I gave a glance at the book in my hand. It was the second volume of "Monsieur Nicholas," by Restif de la Bretonne, dated 1794.

Some time later Bartley finished his examination of the library by bringing me over a yellow-covered book and saying with a laugh, "This is the only thing that is out of place in the library."

I took it from him, glanced at the title, which read, "Digest of the Divorce Laws of the United States," I handed it back to Bartley, saying, "That's a queer thing for him to have."

Bartley agreed, but said with a laugh, "You never can tell what a book lover will have."

It was at this moment that Williams came in, bringing a telegram for Bartley. Almost as soon as he gave it to him, the telephone rang, and he went out in the hall to answer it.

Bartley tore the telegram open and read it, with not a single change of expression, and then threw it over to me. It was from a detective on the New York force and read :

"Think your evidence against Ransome right. He is

mentioned by pawnbroker here, regarding stolen jewellery, though can't prove anything against him. Still may get something in a few days. Hold him a while."

I had not time to ask Bartley about it, for Williams had re-entered and announced that the 'phone call was for Bartley. He brought the telephone with him, on a long lead. Bartley put the receiver to his ear, and said, "Hullo," and then I saw a startled look come over his face.

"Yes," he said, "yes, Mr. Bartley speaking. Yes, Judge, I agree with you. Will come right up. I think as you do, and am very glad that you told me."

He placed the receiver down on the desk when he had finished talking, and stood silent for a moment. His face was grave, and by the way he had acted while speaking over the 'phone I knew that something had happened. But Williams was in the room, and he had no chance to say anything or else felt that he had better wait till we were alone. But after Williams left the room, he said,

"Pelt, we have to go up to the city again at once. I will tell you about it when we are in the car. You better drive yourself."

I ran up for our things and out to the garage, and took the same car that we had in the morning. I was eager to hear what Bartley had to tell, and very curious as to the 'phone call, and why it was we had to take another trip to the city. I decided that in so much as Mrs. Underwood had not returned the message must concern her. But after we got out of the grounds of the estate, I discovered that surmise was wrong. For Bartley started by saying that he did not know what was back of the call, simply that Judge Grant had said that he had some information to give him regarding Mr. Underwood and that he thought it could be given better in his office than anywhere else. When I asked him who Judge Grant was, he told me that he was the leading lawyer in Eastwood.

We found the judge waiting for us. He had a long, thin face, with what they call, I think, in novels a crooked smile. But at the first glance one could tell that he had ability, and could understand why he was considered

the leading lawyer of the city. The rather thin face, cold and austere, the thin lips, and the black eyes made him look like one of the pictures I had often seen of the early Puritan judges of New England.

After greeting us, and telling his office boy that he did not wish to be disturbed, he gave us chairs near his desk, and then turned to speak. One could see that he found it rather difficult to tell his story, and one who knew the confidential relations that are presumed to exist between client and attorney could well understand. But the judge felt it was his duty to speak, and he leaned back in his chair, and clasping his hands one above the other started.

"What I am going to tell you, Mr. Bartley, is in a sense a betrayal of a client. I have thought over the matter for some time, and I have decided that the information might aid you. You can understand, however, how I felt. On one side there has been the ethical side of the matter, the fact that a lawyer is not presumed to relate to a third party what passes between himself and his client. But in this case the client is dead, and the information can hurt no one."

Bartley, leaning forward with his eyes gleaming, said,
"You mean John Underwood?"

The judge nodded. "Yes. You see, Mr. Bartley, I did not hear about the murder till two days ago. I had been away on a yacht and did not see the papers till I returned home. In fact, I did not read the full account of the murder and the inquest till last evening. And then after I read the evidence at the inquest, I felt that I had something that I better give you."

He paused for a moment, slowly folding and unfolding his hands, and then continued,

"I would not have sent for you but for the thought that my evidence might go a good way to prove that one of the motives that they assign to Robert Underwood's killing his father seems to me to be disproved by what I know."

Bartley gave me a contented look, one that as much as said, listen, and the judge went on.

"About four days before his death John Underwood called at my office. He told me he wished to make a new will."

Bartley was following him with the keenest interest, his eyes never leaving the judge's face. I myself could hardly wait to hear what he might say, though for a moment I thought that another bit of evidence against the boy was to come forth, for the judge's statement proved that the witnesses had told the truth when they said that the father said he would change his will.

As if knowing our suspense, the judge picked his words very slowly and used the short, precise tone that he might have used in court. He was very careful to explain all of his statements, as if he wished to be sure that we understood that he was doing an utterly unheard of thing in telling us what he did.

"It was the statement that I read in the paper regarding the inquest that made me think that this statement of Mr. Underwood's should be told to some one who would use it discreetly. The papers, in reporting the inquest, said that the various witnesses that were heard made much of the fact that Mr. Underwood was to change his will. The surmise from that statement was that the young man might have killed his father to prevent his being cut off without a cent."

He paused and looked at Bartley as if waiting for confirmation of this, and when Bartley nodded the judge continued,

"This, of course, was not actually said in the papers. But I am a lawyer, and of course could see at once that the fact that witnesses said Mr. Underwood was to make a new will, together with the fact that his wife testified that he told her he would cut his son off without a cent, would naturally be the chief piece of evidence against the young man. It would give the motive for the crime, that is if he killed him."

Again he paused and looked at Bartley, who, seeing the judge waiting for him to speak, answered,

"That is right, Judge. It's exactly what the police said in giving a reason for arresting the boy."

"That's what I thought," was the reply. "And yet I knew that if they had but that against him, my facts would overthrow their motive for the crime."

Bartley gave me a quick look, his eyes dancing with excitement, and the little pause before the judge's next words seemed endless. But at last he spoke again, playing with a pencil on the desk, which he rolled between his fingers.

"Mr. Underwood came in to see me. You see I do a great deal of business for the people at the Point. They have need of a lawyer, and rather than bother to call their own lawyer from the city they employ some of us here. I might say that I do the bulk of that kind of summer business, and so I was not surprised at his coming in. But I was a little surprised when he said he wanted to talk over my drafting a will for him, for I would have thought that he would have used his personal counsel. So we had a long talk about what he wanted placed in the will."

He dropped the pencil that was in his hand at this point, and bent down to pick it up. As he straightened up, Bartley asked,

"Did you ever deliver the will to him?"

"No," said the judge. "In fact, I never drew it up. All he did that day was to give me the memorandum, and I was to go down to his home at the shore later and draw up the document."

Bartley asked the next question with a good deal of eagerness in his voice,

"And that memorandum disposes of the story that he was to cut off his son?"

The judge smiled, rose to his feet, and went over to a safe that was against the wall. Opening it, he took something out, and came back to us with a long envelope in his hand. From it he took several sheets of paper.

"Yes," he said, "it disproves that. In fact, what Mr. Underwood said to me would be enough to kill that story. He told me that he was changing his will for several reasons, one of which, and it was the only one he told me, was that he wished to give his boy a greater share in the property than he had assigned in the will before us."

I gave a quick look at Bartley. There was a puzzled expression on his face, as if a fact had knocked out some theory that he had formed.

"The will before you," repeated Bartley.

"Yes," replied Judge Grant. "Underwood had his old will with him when he called. He had me read it very carefully before he began to explain the changes he wished to have made."

"But Underwood's former will is now in New York with his regular counsel whom that will names as executor."

"That is strange," replied the judge, "for it was certainly in this office four days before his death. Nor do I think he would return it to Mr. Phelps. I dislike to say this, it is a bit unprofessional, but I take it Underwood planned to remove the matter from Phelps's hands."

"Evidently he changed his mind," said Bartley, "and returned the will to Phelps, though Phelps said nothing to us about it ever having left his hands."

"Naturally," replied the judge, "he would not wish to mention the fact that Underwood had taken it from him."

"Perhaps," I ventured, "Phelps lied, and that he does not have the will."

Both men were silent for a while. Then the judge remarked,

"That is rather absurd. If Phelps told you he had the will, and did not, it would place him in a rather ridiculous light when the time came to produce it."

"Just so," admitted Bartley, "but if Phelps does not have the will, then it should have been in Underwood's safe, but we looked there and found nothing of the sort. Either Phelps has the will or Underwood destroyed it."

"But he would not do that," answered the judge, "he was much too careful a man."

"It may be," I put in, "that Underwood called or sent to Phelps's office for the will in the latter's absence, and that Phelps told us what he thought to be the truth about its being in his office."

"Perhaps some one else has destroyed the will, remarked Bartley. "At least the location and existence

of the will is now in doubt. Let us suppose that it has been destroyed. How, if I may ask you, Judge, would that fact affect the disposition of the property compared with the old will, the contents of which were presumably known to those interested ? ”

“ That question,” replied the Judge, “ I think I can answer with approximate accuracy. If the will is not found, that is, if there is no will, all the gifts to charity and the servants are knocked out. Yet the loss of the will does not make much difference to the two most interested parties. Young Robert, if there is no will, is of course the heir, and the bulk of the estate goes to him. Without a will he gets it at once, without any trust fund. But he does not get any more ; in fact, I should say that it would be about the same, maybe a bit less. Mrs. Underwood under the will received a yearly income under a trust fund, and the house and also a sum of money. With no will she would get as a dower right the interest in the real estate. This would amount, I think, to more than she would receive by the old will. It comes to this, that will or no will, both would receive about the same amount as they would if the will is found and probated, only they get it free from conditions. The son was the only heir. The only persons that suffer are the servants and the charitable institutions that were named. I doubt if the loss of the will affects the people most interested, one way or another.”

“ Then, there would be no reason for destroying the will ? ” asked Bartley.

The judge shook his head in reply, and said,

“ No, none at all. I can’t think of Underwood doing it. If, we will say, he had actually wished to cut off his son, he would not destroy his former will. By doing that, with the will out of the way, then the son became the only heir. Then let’s take it another way. If the son destroyed it, he only cuts himself off from a little money that he might have had.”

“ Unless,” broke in Bartley, “ Underwood had made a new will in which the son was cut off. Now if the son had seen a new will cutting him off, he might destroy it,

thus as heir receiving the estate that otherwise he might not have had."

The judge nodded. "That is true, if Underwood had made another will. But we have good reason to believe that he did not make one, and that he did plan one of quite the opposite nature."

"In other words," commented Bartley, "if the old will were destroyed, then it would be an illogical act."

"Yes," agreed the judge, "it would be."

"Then the facts you have to contribute, while they can help free the son, throw no further light on the affair."

"Of that I am not so sure," returned the judge. "Pardon me, but you interrupted what I was saying about Underwood's plans for the new will with your questioning of the whereabouts of the old one. You understand of course, Mr. Bartley, that what I have told you is something that a lawyer is never presumed to tell an outside party. The relation of client and attorney is presumed to be sacred. But I know you recognize my position, and I might as well tell you all. In the new will he planned he was not to leave his wife a cent."

I gave a start at this, but if Bartley was surprised at the news he did not show it. There was a bored look on his face, a rather absent one, as if he was thinking of something far more important than the story that the judge was telling. A stranger would have thought from looking at him that the story did not interest him, but I knew him and understood that his expression was but a mask for his feelings. But I had no time to think of what I had heard for the judge was speaking again.

"I thought this was strange, but Mr. Underwood specifically put his finger on the section referring to bequests to his wife and said, 'That section comes out.'"

"Are you sure?" asked Bartley.

"Yes, positively. I would not easily forget it, because, with the remark I just quoted, Underwood became suddenly reticent, and gave me no more specific instructions. A little later he ended the interview by saying that he would have me come down to the house in a few days and continue the matter. Hence what I offer is evidence

only of what may have been in Underwood's mind. Nor is there any proof that any one but myself knew aught of it.

"I am sorry to tell you this," continued the Judge, after a pause, "for it seems to throw suspicions where they have, so far as I know, not been thrown before, and yet I have proven nothing."

"Certainly not," said Bartley, "and may I ask you if, in securing a memorandum about the will, you learned who was to be executor of the Underwood estate?"

I thought the question surprised the judge, at least he acted as if it did, but he answered,

"No. Mr. Underwood was not sure, but he thought that maybe he would have a trust company look after it. But he said it could be decided when I came down." Bartley's answer to this was short, simply being, "I see," and a second later we bid good-night to the judge and started on our way to the Point.

It was a silent drive, for Bartley seemed not to be in a talkative mood. It was not till we were two thirds of the way to the house that he said,

"Well, Pelt, I think that the judge's story will be almost enough to clear Robert. It disposes of the question of his having killed his father to prevent him from making a new will."

But before I could speak Bartley continued :

"Pelt, though the judge removed the motive that they tried to bring against the boy, he did not help me any. I had the idea this morning that I knew who the murderer was; the only thing I had to do was to prove it. But to-night I won't go so far as that. I will only say that I think I know now why Underwood was killed."

"Why?" I asked eagerly.

But his answer had nothing to do with my question; in fact, it was utterly irrevlevant to what I had said. He replied,

"I wished to have a talk with Mrs. Underwood to-day, but I am afraid that it will have to go over till to-morrow."

When we reached the house we found that she had already retired.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DEAD MAN TELLS HIS SECRET

NOR did Bartley see Mrs. Underwood the next morning. I am not sure that he tried to, for when I went down to breakfast he had already eaten and left the house on some mission of his own.

I spent the morning rather idly reading and then went in bathing. When I returned to the house I found Bartley at his lunch. As I joined him, he looked up and said : "I have been up with the district attorney this morning and have pulled some wires. Phelps will be down from New York this afternoon and will ask that the boy be allowed out on bail."

I ventured that, as a rule, they did not allow a man who was arrested on a murder charge to have bail. Bartley agreed with this, but said that the attorney for the state agreed that the evidence was slight, and that after hearing what the judge had said about the will had decided that if Phelps asked for bail he would not oppose it.

"So far so good," I said, "but our business is not to free Robert Underwood, but to find the murderer."

His face darkened for a moment, and the tense line came around his lips. "Thanks," he said. "I am aware of my duty."

I said nothing and turned to my dinner. At the close of the meal Williams leaned over and said to us both, "We had a little accident with the coffee, and if you don't mind I will serve it in the library in a moment or so."

So we went into the library, where in a moment Williams brought the coffee. Bartley was standing at the edge of the desk when he received his coffee, and I noticed that he was looking at the floor. He gazed at it rather intently, and then gave a sudden exclamation. "What a foolish thing to overlook!"

He turned and called to Williams, who came over to his side. Pointing to the floor, he asked, "What stood here, Williams?"

The butler gave him a look as if he did not understand the question. Bartley pointed to the floor at his feet, and said,

"I see that something has stood here. There are the four little impressions in the rug, that look as if a small stand or a table stood there, long enough to make those marks in the rug."

I bent over to look, as did Williams. True enough I could see four little marks in the rug, as if made by the legs of a stand. Williams straightened up and answered,

"Oh, yes, sir. Mr. Underwood had a stand there, with one of those machines that you talk letters into, I don't know what you call them."

"A dictaphone," suggested Bartley.

"Yes, sir," answered the butler, "I think that is what they call them. It's like a phonograph and he talked letters in through a tube."

I smiled at this description, but Bartley asked,

"Where is it now?"

"Why," answered the butler, "I took it up in the storeroom."

Bartley shot out one word,

"When?"

I think Williams was getting alarmed at Bartley's tone, for he acted nervously.

"Why, sir, the morning we found Mr. Underwood killed."

Bartley's face flushed, and he said,

"What do you mean?"

The butler gave me a look, as much as to ask why he was so interested in such a matter, and continued,

"Why, when we came in the room, after we broke in the door, the stand on which that thing stood was on the floor and the machine with it. There was a lot of those wax things, long things, like the old phonograph records that they used to have, that had fallen out of the stand, and they were broken, that is some of them were. And

the machine was all broke up. So as it was in the way and of no use I took it up in the storeroom to get rid of it."

"Who told you to take it out of the room?"

"Why, no one," said the butler in a surprised tone. "No one. It was broken and in the way, so I simply removed it."

Bartley gave a gesture of disgust, and said in an awed tone,

"My God, and then you did not think it was of importance enough to say anything about?"

The butler was rather frightened at Bartley's manner.

"No, sir, I never thought of saying anything. Mr. Vance saw me too, and I guess Mrs. Underwood did, but I never thought it amounted to anything. I am sorry if it was wrong."

His air was such that Bartley gave a sudden smile, that lit up his face, and said kindly,

"Never mind, Williams, you did not mean any wrong, but you should have left it in the room, and not have moved a thing. Now tell me, did Mr. Underwood use the machine while he was alone nights?"

The butler nodded.

"I think he sometimes spoke letters into the thing, and had Mr. Vance write them the next morning."

Bartley was silent a moment, walking the length of the room and back, but when he reached the desk where we both were standing he turned to Williams,

"Williams, we will go up in the storeroom with you, and see that dictaphone."

The old man turned and went out of the room, we following him. Up the long stairs, then down the hall and up another flight of stairs we had to go before we reached the storeroom. It was like all rooms used for that purpose, filled with furniture that had been cast aside, old magazines, hundreds of these in piles, and all the outcast things that one finds in such a room.

The dictaphone was over in a corner, on a stand. At its foot was a small box, filled with the wax records, and at least half of them were broken. At first glance the dictaphone did not seem to be injured. But after

Bartley had looked it over he discovered that it was hopelessly broken. There was no record on the cylinder of the machine when we found it, and presently Bartley asked Williams if there had been one in the place when the machine was found in the library.

Williams did not comprehend at first, and Bartley had to place a record on the metal receiving cylinder to make him comprehend clearly what he wanted to know.

Finally Williams, a little doubtfully, expressed the opinion that there had been no record on the machine as they found it.

At this Bartley seemed a little disappointed. But he asked Williams to carry the machine and the existing records to his room. Here it was placed on a table where he again turned his attention to the broken machine. But it was no use, the mechanism was jambled and he could not get it to work either by the electric current or by turning the machine by hand. But at length, after fooling over the thing for about thirty minutes, he gave it up in disgust, and dropped into his armchair, and pulled out his pipe. After he got it going to his satisfaction he leaned back in the chair, his eyes turned toward the ceiling, watching the smoke rings that he was blowing. Without changing his position he drawled,

"Pelt, have you found anything in this case that would be a good motive for Underwood's death?"

I thought of the piece of paper, on which only the day before I had set down my reasons for thinking certain people might be connected with the crime. I blushed for a second, as I remembered what I had indeed set down, and I was glad that same piece of paper was safe in my inside pocket. I am not so sure but what Bartley had an idea of what I was thinking, for he gave me a curious glance, and then turned his head away. But as I did not speak he answered his own question.

"You know, Pelt," he said, "the key to this case lies in that word motive."

"Do you think," I asked, "that Ransome could have killed him for that three thousand dollars that we found

in his desk, or rather that you took out of Vance's pocket?"

Bartley gave a weary sigh, shaking his head.

"No, Pelt, I do not think that Ransome killed him to secure the money. I don't know how he got it, but he does not figure with me as being the one that did the deed. I admit that when I discovered that the envelope contained that missing money I did wonder if Ransome knew anything about the crime; understand me, not that he was the murderer, but knew something about it, and," he paused, then added, "I am not so sure now but what he does."

He picked up a magazine that was on the desk, turned a few pages, then laid it down, and continued,

"Of course that money will have to be explained by him. His story that he never knew it was in his house, and that Vance must have hidden it there while he was away, is not true. But again there is a very interesting problem involved in the shooting of Vance. Still"—and he gave a yawn—"Ransome will talk before it is all over."

"But," I asked, "why is Mrs. Underwood so interested in Ransome?"

Bartley threw me a quick look.

"I am not sure yet, Pelt; that is another thing that must be cleared up. She is interested in him, that is sure, and was frightened at hearing that he was arrested for murder. You remember that for a moment she thought it was for the murder of her husband."

I nodded, and he went on, "As I said before, I think that Ransome has something that we must find out. She went up to see him at the jail, but I expected that would happen, and they will not let any one see him, not a paper either will he be allowed, and in a day or so he will be a rather anxious man."

Another thought struck me and I said,

"Do you know, I don't think that Mrs. Underwood seemed to feel her husband's death as badly as one would expect."

Bartley gave a short answer, "She didn't."

Rather pleased at his agreeing with me I ventured further,

"And I have got it into my head that maybe there was some serious trouble between them.

Bartley turned in his chair and looked with a puzzling smile.

"You think that?" he asked. "Why?"

"Oh, several things made me think so. You know that she did not bother to see him after her return from New York, and was not a bit concerned at his not coming to her room, or anxious that she did not see him the next morning. You would expect a wife who had been away for some days would at least see her husband when she returned. As she did not, I thought that maybe they had some kind of a difference."

Bartley smiled, answering,

"You are right as far as you go. They were on rather strained terms, for Underwood had discovered something about his wife that caused him much displeasure. It was something in her past life, I think."

I wondered just what it might be, and asked him if he knew anything about her before her marriage.

"Well, he replied, "she was an actress, you know. You saw her yourself in a 'Winter Garden show.' "

"Yes," I answered with a grin, "but her ability as an actress depended entirely upon her figure."

Bartley laughed.

"That's about all they want in an actress to-day. If she can dance, if her legs are worth showing, why she is an actress. But Underwood met her there. She came from some small town in New York, and, as far as I can find out, there was nothing against her character. In fact, she lived a rather simple life, avoided the white lights and the night life. This, I understand, was the first thing that attracted Underwood to her, a simple case of the wealthy man that wanted a young and beautiful wife, and married her. I think he actually was in love, but I have, and I am sure that the idea is correct, a feeling that it was his wealth that she cared the most about. But there came the day when something rose

out of her past life, and when he discovered what it was he began to be alarmed."

"How did you find that out?" I asked.

He rose to his feet, walking over to the dictaphone which stood on a table, and for a while fooled with it. Then he turned and said,

"He told me."

"Who?"

With just a trace of amusement in his voice he answered,

"John Underwood."

Puzzled, I asked,

"But when did you see him?"

He smiled.

"I never saw him, but he told me four days ago."

In consternation I gasped.

"But he was dead."

Bartley threw back his head and laughed.

"I know it, but he told me just the same."

CHAPTER XX

MRS. UNDERWOOD DECIDES TO TALK

I HAVE been startled by statements of Bartley's many times, but none gave me the shock that his remark about Mr. Underwood did. I knew that Bartley took little stock in spiritualism, though he had looked into the thing, as he had all things that people are interested in. Yet here, he just informed me, that a man that was dead had given him information regarding his wife. For a moment I thought he must have lost his mind, or else that he was fooling me. But a look at Bartley, who had resumed his chair, told me that he was in earnest. True, around his lips there played a smile, and there was a laughing look in his eyes, as he watched my astonished face. In fact, my astonishment was so great that in the end he burst into a roar of laughter. This did not add to my knowledge, for I saw nothing to laugh at. But Bartley, after he had laughed, took pains to explain what he meant.

"I don't mean, Pelt, that Underwood himself told me anything with his own mouth, or that I have seen a letter that he wrote, or anything like that. But just the same he gave me the information."

Still puzzled, and in fact even more than before, I said,

"Then what in the devil do you mean?"

Again he laughed.

"You remember the dream that Phelps told us Underwood had?"

I nodded. And Bartley, his face now serious, said, "You remember that the dream went like this. He would be in a great field and at his feet would be a white flower, the only one in the field. Then while he looked, the flower turned into a great tree, with vines hanging from it, a tree wild, decayed, with the vines plucking at his feet from which he tried to escape. Then suddenly he saw the tree falling on him, and knew that it would

destroy his life. The other dream, which was the first one he had, was the same, except a great snake tried to destroy the flower, a snake which he in turn tried to kill with an axe. Well, Pelt, out of that dream, or rather in that dream, I found my first ray of light in this case."

I remembered the dream and knew what he meant. For though I myself did not know much regarding the scientific interpretation of dreams, yet I had read Freud's book, and I knew that Bartley had made quite a study on the subject. So, eager to hear what he had found out from the dream, I settled back to listen.

" You may remember from reading Freud that he claims that every dream has a meaning. Not that the future is to be revealed, but that the dream is a sign post to the hidden life and thoughts of the dreamer. It reveals their subconscious desires. He claims that every dream has a sexual basis, but the word sexual he gives a larger meaning than we do in common speech. Then again the formula of dream interpretation says that a dream is a repressed wish. A desire on the part of the dreamer that lies hidden in goodly part of his active thinking life, but which, when the mind is free, comes to the front. And this coming to the front of the repressed wishes and desires of an individual is more apt to come when the individual is asleep, when all his faculties are at rest, except the brain, which never sleeps. Then all the wishes, desires, from the subconscious life, have their play, and are expressed in dreams."

He paused and looked at me, to see if I understood, then continued,

" Now most dreams involve more than one thing. In a dream you find often a number of wishes, wishes which struggle in the mind of the dreamer. Of course all objects of desire are expressed in symbols. If you can understand them, you gain an insight into the life, the thoughts, of the dreamer. Now Underwood had similar dreams many times. The action changed but little in each one, showing that the thing that troubled him was of great importance. The fact that it came forth in his dreams again and again, told me that it was something

that he did not care to make public, but something that was of such importance that he even felt sometimes that it might be better if he died."

"Died?"

"Yes, but there is nothing of great importance in that fact alone. Every person has sometimes, in their hours of trouble, expressed the common wish, 'I wish I were dead.' What they actually meant was, if I were dead my trouble would be ended. The wish to be dead simply meaning that they wished the trouble was over, hidden or got out of the way. You see what I mean?"

That was plain enough, and I said so. He continued:

"Well, to take his dream. I start with the theory of Freud. That back of it was a sex meaning. You remember that there was a white flower in a field. The white flower, whiteness, is a common symbol for purity, for a woman. The being alone in the field simply meant that it was the one woman that he cared anything about. Suddenly the flower, the woman, to use the real meaning, changed into a rough and unkempt tree, with vines that plucked at his feet. And then he saw as he tried to escape from the vines that the tree was falling and would crush him." He paused, then asked, "Now the woman was—?"

I broke in eagerly, "His wife?"

"Yes," he answered seriously, "his wife. What other woman would he be apt to be interested in? He had been married but a short time, she represented the white flower; in fact, I am told he became interested in her first because he had been told that her life was different than the average girl of the stage. But the flower turning into the tree means that he discovered something about her, something that she had hidden, I would say, that may have been in her life before she met him. That fact caused the vision of purity to vanish, or at least he thought so. Moreover, it was something that would involve him, the vines plucked at his feet, the dream goes. His discovery of the fact caused him serious trouble, so serious that he subconsciously thought that he might be better dead than alive, there is your falling

tree. But remember the first dream, for that is important. Here a snake tried to devour the flower, and he tries to kill the snake. This was the first step. Here he discovered this fact, the fact that seemed to harm the woman—the flower—more than himself. It seems as if at this point he did not know all that he must have found out later, for he wished—the suppressed wish, you see—to destroy the thing that was harming his wife. The snake is a common symbol, and I judge refers, I think, to some one that must have come to him and told him something about his wife. The last is just surmise, however. But as time went on, his dream changed. He did not think he could destroy the snake, hide the thing. He was afraid it would injure himself, the flower was a great tree, evil, the story was true, and then came the wonder, how could he hide the whole thing?"

He looked at me as if waiting for me to speak, as if he wished to see what I thought of the interpretation of the dream. As he had unfolded his viewpoint, and had spoken of the various parts of the dream, it seemed so clear and reasonable that I wondered why I had not thought of it myself. But there was one thing that I wished to know, and asked,

"Have you any idea what it was that bothered him?"

"Now," he answered, "I expected you to ask that. At first I thought it might have some connection with the murder, that the death of Underwood grew out of something concerned in that secret that he found out. But now I have changed my mind. I think now that there is little connection between what may be hidden in the trouble that he was in, and the murder. As to what he found out about his wife, I do not know. That is, I have a theory, for, of course, there must be another man mixed up in it. But I don't think he had anything to do with the murder."

Just at this moment an automobile drove up to the house. Some one felt called upon to blow the horn again and again, its shrill sound being just beneath our window. Curious, I went and looked out. There directly underneath us I saw one of the great cars of the

estate, and Phelps climbing out, his face covered with smiles, and behind him Robert Underwood. The servants, aroused by this time, were running to the front of the house, where they seemed overjoyed to see the young man again. Bartley followed me, and with his hands in his pockets watched the reception that Underwood was having. He made but one comment, "Phelps has got him out of jail, on bail, you know. But he never will go back."

A second later we went down to the door to give our welcome. There was a small crowd around the young man. Williams, his face one great smile, was hovering around him, as if he did not wish to let him out of his sight. The servants were crowding him, shaking his hands, and telling him how glad they were that he was back. Phelps, dressed as if he had come out of a band box, the red stones of his rings flashing in the sunlight, stood a little away, watching the scene, and also smiling. Only Mrs. Underwood was absent, but even as I wondered at this she came running out of the hall, and threw her arms around the boy and kissed him. She seemed to show more liking at his return than I had expected that she would.

When we were able we paid our respects to him. His night in jail had left its mark on his face. He looked as if he had not slept, there were dark circles around his eyes, and he looked tired. But his smile was catching, and that he was overjoyed to be back it was easy to see. After a word, we turned to Phelps, who greeted Bartley with the words, "Well, it was an easy matter to get this young chap down here." Then he frowned and grumbled. "It was an outrage to arrest him. They had nothing against him. But leave it to the country police."

We talked a while, and entered the house. Underwood was not in sight, but Mrs. Underwood was talking to Williams. As she caught sight of Bartley she came over to him and said,

"I am able to see you now if you wish. If you will come up to my rooms in about fifteen minutes I will see you."

She smiled rather graciously, and I wondered again why she had shown such ill temper when she had returned. But whatever had troubled her seemed to have passed away, and she was acting as I thought she should. Then also she really seemed glad that Underwood's son had returned.

We talked with Phelps for a little while. He told us that he expected to stay all the next day, and that he would be at the hotel till the next noon. Hearing this, Bartley asked him to come to the house that night at nine o'clock, and then to my wonder said that he expected to throw over the case, and wished Phelps and the rest to understand why he did. I expected that Phelps might demand that he work on it a while longer, but he only gave a little laugh and said,

"All right, over to, shall we say, a conference?"

Bartley gave him a look, and smiled back, "That will do as well as any other word." Then, turning to me, he said good-bye to Phelps, and told me it was time to see Mrs. Underwood. I was ready and followed him up the stairs. All the time I was wondering why Bartley should have told Phelps that he was to throw over the case. Did it mean that he thought a solution was hopeless? But that idea seemed absurd. He never gave up a case till he had exhausted every effort. And, to me, the evidence just seemed to be getting interesting. But there was no time for any more thoughts, for he had knocked at the door, and when a voice said "Come in!" we entered.

It was the sitting-room of Mrs. Underwood's suite—a large room that ran across the front of the house and faced the sea, with four large windows. As I looked it over, I realized that it was indeed a very beautiful room—a room for a beautiful woman to live in. The colour scheme ran to blue and gold, with beautiful tapestries on the wall and fine Turkish rugs on the floor. There was a great fireplace on one side, and a book case, well filled with books.

Mrs. Underwood herself rose to greet us. Again I realized what a beautiful woman she was. In truth she looked more like a young girl whose innocent eyes had

yet to look upon the stern things of existence. She had changed her gown, and wore a simple white, silk frock, with short skirt, low neck and short sleeves. She looked more like a girl of seventeen than a widow whose husband had been murdered. Well had they praised her figure in those short years that she was on exhibition before the footlights. With a smile she greeted us both, saying, "I am sorry, Mr. Bartley, that I took so long in receiving you, but I was not able to do so this morning."

Apparently she was candour itself, willing and actually glad to see us, though she must have wondered what Bartley had to say. In fact, the thought passed through my mind, that if it was true that she had some secret that her husband had discovered she must actually fear Bartley's visit, particularly if that secret was even remotely coupled with his death.

She sank into a great chair, making a pretty picture as she leaned back and looked up at us, and motioned us to chairs by her side. There was a small table near her chair, upon which, to my surprise, was a box of cigars and a tin of cigarettes. She noticed my eyes on these and said, "I hope you will smoke; it does not bother me, and I use cigarettes myself."

Bartley thanked her, and took a cigar, passing one to me. Then, taking the cigarettes in his hand, he said, "Will you join us?"

With a little laugh she took one, and Bartley lighted the match for her cigarette, and a second after she blew a thread of white smoke from between her pretty lips. I noticed that Bartley, before placing the cigarettes back, glanced at them carefully. Then, after lighting his cigar, he turned to her.

"Mrs. Underwood," he said, "I thought that we better have a talk. There were some things that I had to ask you, and I want you to feel that I am not trying to injure you, but, in fact, if you will give me your confidence, can aid you."

She said nothing, though I noticed a troubled look came over her face. After waiting for her to speak, Bartley continued,

MRS. UNDERWOOD DECIDES TO TALK 201

" You said you knew nothing about Mr. Underwood's death. Have you any idea as to who might have killed him?"

She had placed her cigarette on the stand, and answered almost before he finished.

" No. As far as I know there was no one that had any reason to kill him. He never complained about an enemy, and so far as I know there was no reason for any one to kill him."

Bartley was watching her face, and I could tell that the whole conversation was to be serious on his part.

" And when you testified about Robert's being cut off in the will, did you think that fact, and the other things that you testified, might make people think that the boy killed his father ? "

She leaned forward in her chair, her face flushing as she said,

" Mr. Bartley, I knew later that people might say that, might even say that I wished them to think so. But Mr. Underwood did insist that he was to change his will." Her face became thoughtful and she looked at us confidently. " Sometimes I think Mr. Underwood was not himself when he said that. For he loved Robert, loved him more than he ever showed. He never was a man to show his emotions much. But I never testified as I did to harm the boy. I never thought it would. It seemed absurd that any one should think so. I knew he had left the house before Mr. Underwood was killed."

She was talking rapidly and excited, and I doubt if she knew just what she was saying. But the last statement caused me to turn towards Bartley, whose eyes commanded me to keep silent. But I wondered what she intended us to understand, by saying she knew he had left the house before Mr. Underwood was killed. She had not testified to that in the box, and if she had it would have cleared up many things. But she did not notice what she was saying, for she swept on.

" But after the inquest, when I saw what they were saying in the papers about Robert, I was very much alarmed. I testified as I did because I had never been in a court, or in the witness box, and I had to tell what

I knew, did I not ? ” She looked at us, an appeal in her dark eyes. But without waiting for an answer she said, “ You see, Robert never cared very much for me. He did not like the idea of his father marrying again, and my being so many years younger than his father displeased him more. So we never became very good friends, though I did my best. After the inquest, that also bothered me. I was afraid that people would think I testified as I did, in spite.”

She paused, Bartley’s face, which was very grave, showed nothing of what he was thinking. But as soon as she finished speaking he said,

“ You say you knew that Robert left the house before Mr. Underwood was killed. Why did not you say that at the inquest ? ”

She gave us a startled look, and became confused, her face flushing red and stammered,

“ Why, I mean, that—that is, I found that out after he, Robert, testified.”

Bartley gave her a quick look; her answer had displeased him, I could see. The question had confused her, and she tried to hide it by bending to tie her shoe ribbon. Bartley suddenly threw out his hands, and then said quickly,

“ What time was it that you left Mr. Underwood on the night of the murder ? ”

She almost jumped out of her chair, and I confess that I felt like doing it myself. She tried to speak, turned white, and only after an effort, faltered,

“ Why, I never—I don’t know what you mean.”

He looked at her a moment, the woman going completely to pieces, and then with a little smile and a tender tone in his voice, reached forward and laid his hands on her knee a moment, saying,

“ Mrs. Underwood, don’t you think you better be frank with me. I know that on the night of the murder you were in his room.”

She gave him an appealing glance that questioned if she dared to speak, but assured by his look, asked,

“ How do you know ? ”

He answered in a low voice,

"The morning after the murder I found the remains of some cigars and some cigarettes in the room."

She gave a little start of betrayal at this, started to speak, but he gave her no chance. "The cigars, I think, were simple to understand. But the cigarettes not so easy. Mr. Underwood did not smoke them, and Robert does not smoke at all. Then again they were not the cigarettes that a man uses. They were the long, thin cigarettes that a woman uses. I knew from that, that sometime that night some woman had been in the room. When Williams testified that he heard a woman's voice, as he thought, about eleven o'clock in the library, I knew he was right, and that he had fixed the time she was there. Then the question was, Who was the woman? I found out you smoked. I even got hold of the cigarettes that you use. They were the same make that were in the library. And, in fact, they were the same kind that you are smoking now." And he waved his hand at the table upon which stood the tin box of cigarettes.

While he was speaking her face was a study. Back of all her distress there was fear, and she no longer looked like the sixteen or seventeen-year-old girl that I had seen when we came into the room. She did not seem very much surprised at what he had said; the discovery, the reasoning, was so simple that she herself must have wondered that others had not found it out. But she was afraid, and of what, I wondered, for there was nothing in Bartley's tone to frighten her. In fact, he spoke as one would speak to a child that they were trying to enlighten.

He waited for her to answer, but she did not at first, not until he had quietly informed her that in so much as he knew that she had been in the room on the night of the murder, it was far better that she answer now than have him present the fact to the district attorney. The mention of the district attorney made her speak, for it was clear to see that she did not relish the idea of having to tell why she had not told this fact at the inquest. So in a voice that broke more than once, in sentences that were more or less disconnected, she at last spoke.

"Yes, it is true that I was in the library, the night

that, that he was—" she paused for a while, her gaze on the floor, and when she spoke the next word, it was in a whisper, " murdered." There was silence again on her part, a silence that Bartley did not at first break, but he at last asked,

" And what time was that ? "

" It was about eleven o'clock."

She seemed unwilling to say anything more, and with a little touch of anger in his voice, he said,

" I presume you understand, Mrs. Underwood, that you, so far as we know, were the last person that saw Mr. Underwood alive. In fact, if we are unable to find out any other facts, there would be those that might go to the extreme of saying that you knew something about the death of your husband."

She gave a cry, lifting a face in which fright and anger played an equal part. Her voice was high as she cried,

" But I don't, I don't ! "

" I never said you did," he answered, " but there will be those that will say that, having concealed your visit to the library, you had a motive in doing so."

For a moment the man and the woman looked at each other. Bartley, with his eyes boring into her very soul, till at length she dropped her gaze. Then as if she had formed a sudden resolution, she raised her head and looked him in the eyes. Her voice was firm, as she replied, " I will tell you all I know." She gave a wan smile, and added,

" I judge I might as well, for I presume you know almost everything that I can tell you. I did go to the library. Mr. Underwood and myself had had a little argument before I went to New York"—she flushed as she said this. " But though it was not serious, it hurt me. When I returned the night he was killed, I expected that he would come to my room, but as the night went on and he did not I decided to go down to the library and see him. It was about eleven o'clock, maybe a little before. I had partly undressed, because I had a bad headache, so I simply threw a dressing-gown over my clothes and went down. I saw no one in the hall, and knocked at the library door and then opened it. Mr.

Underwood was at his desk, writing." She paused as if the recollection was too much for her, but in a moment continued,

" We had a talk."

" About what ? "

" The will," breathed Mrs. Underwood, in scarcely more than a whisper.

" Then," said Bartley, rather brutally, " you have lied about the change in the will that your husband proposed to make—for you knew that his reason for the proposed change was not to cut off Robert, but yourself."

Mrs. Underwood's face flushed. " But he did not," she cried; " he did not intend to cut me off, and he did say he would also change Robert's share."

" We will let the matter of Robert rest for the time—what I want to know now is what change your husband told you was to be made in the will itself ? "

" He hardly knew, himself—that was one thing that worried him. But he wanted to change it to protect me better."

" Just what do you mean ? "

" I mean," she stammered with embarrassment, " that he proposed to make the will bequeathing me my portion in my maiden name."

" Then I take it that you were not Underwood's legal wife ? "

" How could you ask that," replied Mrs. Underwood, almost defiantly. " We were married in New York. It was in all of the papers."

Bartley nodded. " But," he said, " you admit that your husband wished to make his bequest to you in your maiden name—presumably because it was your legal name."

" It's a long story," confessed Mrs. Underwood, " and one that I hoped I would never have to tell—you see, when we were married in New York, we both thought the marriage was legal. And then Mr. Underwood found out that our marriage was not legal."

" Not legal," repeated Bartley.

" Yes, he found out that I had been married before."

CHAPTER XXI

A WIDOW WHO WAS NOT A WIFE

I REMEMBER that Bartley said but one word in answer to her statement, but the tone of his voice said everything. The word was "Ah." I myself rather doubted if I had heard rightly, and repeated after her, "Married?"

She nodded, and then continued, and it was easy to see that, having at last told what had been hidden for so long, she was resolved to tell all.

"Yes, I was married when I was about nineteen, but later got a divorce. I only lived with my husband a few weeks. In fact, he deserted me, taking several hundred dollars that I had, and I have never seen him since."

"You got a divorce?" Bartley asked.

"Yes, about a year after, when I was in the West, South Dakota, with a stock company."

Bartley, who had seemed rather dissatisfied at this, said, "And I presume when you met Mr. Underwood you failed to tell him anything about this?"

She flushed, but answered, "No, I did not. I know now that I should have done so. I tried several times to tell him, but he always said he was not interested. And, again, I was afraid. It was a chance for me, a chance for happiness, a chance to become the wife of one of the leading men in the country, and I thought that since I had been divorced it would make not a bit of difference my not telling him."

Bartley gave an exclamation of disgust.

"But, Mrs. Underwood, you should have had that fact on your New York marriage licence."

Again she flushed, "I know it, but I did not want him to know then, so I told a lie, and they filled in the blanks, saying it was my first marriage, and that I had not been divorced."

"Now, I suppose your husband never appeared to defend the suit, in Dakota. How did your lawyer notify him?"

She thought a moment, saying after a while,

"Why, we did not know where he was, and I think that my lawyer put a notice in the paper that was published in the town where my divorce was granted, and then mailed the paper to his last address in New York city."

Bartley rose to his feet at this, and paced back and forth, at last pausing by her side and looking down at her.

"That's what they call service by publication. The chances are that he never knew anything about the suit. And so your husband found out that your marriage was not legal in the State of New York, and that in that state if any one took exception to the marriage they could prove that you were not legally Mr. Underwood's wife."

She made a little gesture of despair.

"Yes, I know it now. That was what troubled Mr. Underwood."

Bartley turned to me, saying, "You know, Pelt, that the most damnable mix up in legal circles that we have in the United States lies in our divorce laws. The laws and grounds for divorce are different in every state in the Union. New York, for instance, has but one ground, and the laws have said that a divorce granted in another state, where the defendant has notice only by publication, is not valid in the State of New York. In this case Mrs. Underwood's first marriage was in New York, the divorce took place in another state, and the odds are her former husband never knew anything about it till after it was over. Such being the case, she was still his wife in New York, and unable to marry again in the state. Of course if no one objected to her marriage the state itself would not bother. This was what bothered Mr. Underwood. Some one told him of the fact, and he saw where not only trouble could be made for her but even for himself. In fact, her first husband could sue her for divorce in New York, naming Underwood as the co-respondent."

Mrs. Underwood broke in on him, saying, "That is what bothered him, the last thing that you said."

Then said Bartley shrewdly, "Some one must have told him."

"Yes, some one of course did. In the early part of the year I noticed that for some reason or another he seemed to be depressed. I asked him several times what the matter might be, but each time he put me off. It was not until the first of June that he told me that he had found out that I had been married before meeting him. Of course there was something of a scene, though I made the most of it, I am afraid. He was not angry, but said he was hurt that I should not have understood that the fact I had been married would have made no difference to him. At that time he said that he did not expect that any serious trouble would result, though he was afraid that the public might know of it."

Bartley shook his head with a sympathetic air.

"I can understand why he would not want anything of that kind known. He always prided himself that there had never been any scandal about his life, as there has about so many others of our rich men."

Mrs. Underwood agreed to this.

"Yes, that was the reason that he felt so badly over it. But later——" She paused for a moment, as if the recollection was not a very pleasing one, continuing after a while, "Later things grew worse, and just before I went to New York he told me that my husband was saying that if we ever came back to New York, he would sue me for divorce."

"How did he hear about your first marriage?"

For a moment she played with her handkerchief, twisting it into a tiny ball.

"Mr.—Mr. Ransome told him that my husband was going to make trouble, but he thought that maybe he could buy him off."

We both gave a start at this, Bartley exclaiming,

"Ransome! How did he know anything about it?"

She flushed, but answered bravely enough, "He was my former husband's brother. I had played in a little

sketch with him before I was married, but after that I had only seen him once or twice, till he came down here."

"Did you not wonder at his coming down here, at his having money enough to rent the place next door?"

"Yes, I did; I wondered where he got his money."

Bartley's face never expressed his thoughts, but for once I could see that he felt that he had hit upon something that was important. His eyes glittered with excitement as he asked,

"Did you know if Mr. Underwood ever paid him any money?"

"He told me that he had given him money at various times. I did not know much about it. On the night that he was killed he spoke for the first time about paying over money. I judged that Ransome was able, or thought he would be able, to buy his brother off. Get him out of the country."

"Do you know if your husband gave him any money on the day he was killed?"

She nodded. "He told me that he was not intending to pay any more money; that he had an idea that Ransome was not playing square, and that he had just given the last sum that he would ever get from him. I understood him to say that he had given it to him that afternoon. Two or three thousand dollars."

"He never thought of having his lawyer, Mr. Phelps, look into the matter for him?"

"No," she answered, "I think he did not wish any one to know about it, that is at that time. He had the idea that the payment of a small sum of money might straighten the matter out. But the last time I saw him—in—the library—he said that he was finished, that he would, if bothered in the future, have a detective look into the matter and a lawyer handle it."

Bartley was whistling very softly to himself, a sure sign that he had a theory working. He asked,

"Did you ever see your first husband after he left you?"

"No. I never saw or heard a thing about him. He was, so I discovered after I had married, not only a heavy

drinker but a rank coward. That was one reason why I wondered a little at his daring to come to Mr. Underwood for money, or, if he did not come himself, send his brother."

"And Ransome, did he tell you that his brother was trying to make trouble? You saw him a good deal; did he speak about the matter?"

She shook her head. "Not at first, not till after Mr. Underwood had told me himself. After that Ransome talked about it and said that he was afraid that he might not be able to keep him silent."

"And after the murder, what did he say?"

She grew red, her face filling with colour, but she was answering all his questions as if she had decided that some one must be told, and that he might aid her more than any one else.

"He told me that the whole thing must never come out; that if it did, I would not share in the estate because I would not be in a legal sense Mr. Underwood's wife. Also he added that I would be sent to jail for perjury, in not telling the truth when I swore to my marriage licence. I was frightened and then again I did not wish to have Mr. Underwood's memory attacked, so I kept still."

Bartley, after asking her permission, took a cigar from his case, lighted it, and for a while sat watching the smoke curl to the ceiling. I knew that he was running over in his mind the story that we had heard, trying to discover its strength and weakness. Mrs. Underwood watched him, watched him with an anxious look on her face; a face that looked many years older than when we had entered the room. Her story had not been an easy one to tell, and though I felt that she had done her stepson a great wrong in keeping silent, yet I could understand her effort to avoid publishing her story to the world.

For a space there was silence, a silence that Bartley was the first to break.

"Did you and your husband ever consider being remarried in another state?" he asked.

"Yes, we did, but he was afraid of the publicity that

would be sure to attach to the issuing of a marriage licence in his name—he was so well known, you see. Moreover, just as you said to Mr. Pelt—he considered the legal tangle of marriage and divorce laws a great bother. It seemed that we were legally married in some states and not in others. He had a rare sense of humour and even joked about it sometimes when we drove over a state line. He had a horror of the possible scandal that would come if we were re-married after a year and a half—so he thought as a temporary precaution to change the wording of his will—that at least would be private till after his death—with my interest safe-guarded so he would have time to solve the other problem."

"Did he ever consult a lawyer in the matter of changing his will?"

"Not that I knew of."

"And the old will—where was it at the time of his death?"

"In the safe, I suppose—why, it's there now; isn't it?"

"It is not."

"But it must be, unless the person who shot him took it—it was on his desk that night when I came in. He read some of it and discussed it, the wording of the proposed change. But before I left he took it over to the safe and put it away and locked the door. You see, he told me that he had some other work that would keep him up for several hours, and as I had a headache he would not try to see me till the next day. So I left him. I saw no one in the hall when I went to my room."

"Did he say what the work was that he had to do?"

She thought a moment, then replying,

"I do not remember. I do remember, however, he said he had some letters to dictate for Vance to get out the next morning."

"Then there was a dictaphone in the room that night? Where is it now?"

"Why," stammered Mrs. Underwood, "I had never realized it was gone."

Bartley did not explain but instead asked :

"Did he speak of his son?"

"Yes; he said that Robert had been in to see him, and that he was going back to college. He also said that maybe he had been rather harsh with him, but that everything was settled, and that Robert was going on a yachting trip and would be with us in a few days."

"Did he say he expected any one?"

"No, simply that he had work to do. I wanted to stay with him, but he insisted that I go to bed, as I had a headache, and get some rest."

Bartley gave a little smile as he asked the next question.

"You did not expect to see him that night then?"

A faint blush touched her face. "I laid awake for over an hour, not knowing but what he might come up. But then I fell asleep. I was very tired, and did not wake till they knocked on my door and the maid said that Mr. Underwood was not in his room."

"And when you went in the library the next morning you saw him for the first time since you said good-night in the library?"

She simply nodded in answer to this.

"If Robert is arrested again," said Bartley slowly, "or they bring him to trial, you will have to tell this story. If you had told it in the witness box it would have cleared him."

She flushed at his tone, at the reproach that was in it, and the vision that he held forth was not pleasing, for she said,

"I hope I do not have to tell it. I know now that I should have done it, but I was afraid."

Almost as she finished the last word, Bartley shot his question at her.

"Were you also afraid that you would be asked what you picked up from the floor when you went into the library the morning of the murder?"

She gave an anguished look, one that actually asked, "How do you know?" and it was not till he had repeated the question that she answered in a low voice: "A revolver."

He gave her no time to think or arrange her thoughts,

for he shot out the next question in a short concise voice,

"And why did you hide it?"

She gave an appealing look, but found no mercy in his face. He was now the man on a trail, a trail that would bring him nearer the solution of the case. So she had to answer, though it was not hard to tell that she did not wish to.

"Because, I—oh, because I was afraid that they—might—would see it, and know whose it was—" And her voice died away.

"And whose was it?"

"I thought it was Mr. Ransome's. I knew he had one similar. I had seen him shooting with it on the shore—a black automatic revolver—and I thought—"

"You thought what?"

"Why, I thought at first that he might have been the one that had killed Mr. Underwood, and when I saw the gun my first impulse was to hide it. It was easy to do. I sent the butler and Vance out of the room to telephone, and I hid it in my dress. Then when I went upstairs I threw it under Robert's bed, for I knew no one would go into his room. But when I went to look for it, it had gone, vanished."

Bartley looked at me, as much as to say, what else will the woman tell us, then turned his attention to her.

"Why should you think that Ransome had killed your husband?"

She made a little gesture with her hand, what it expressed I do not know, as she replied,

"Once or twice in the last few days before Mr. Underwood died, he said things, not exactly said anything, but his expression more than anything else and his tone made me think that he might do him some injury. Then when I saw the gun, my first thought was that he had killed him, maybe because he had not given him all the money that he wished. And then I was afraid, deadly afraid that, now my husband was dead, Ransome might tell the story of my first marriage and divorce. But later I changed my mind about his knowing anything of the murder. His surprise was as great as mine. He

told me that at the hour of the murder he was down to the General Green, that road house down the shore road, and could prove it."

Bartley rose to his feet, as a sign that the questions had reached an end. He stood looking down at the woman, who, despite her two marriages, was but a girl. His face lost its stern look, and a look of pity took his place. Yet he said,

" You know, of course, Mrs. Underwood, that you have been guilty of a great wrong by not telling some of these things in the witness box. You would have saved Robert much discomfort, and the police would not have arrested him. You know also, that if there should be no discovery of the murderer, many people would say that you, being the last person who saw him alive, might have had a motive for the crime yourself——"

She gave a little cry at this, and in a broken voice said,

" Please, Mr. Bartley, do not say that. I—I know I should have told these things, but to tell them was to say to the whole world that I had lied, that I had deceived my husband, and that I was not in his own state his wife. Afterwards, I was afraid to tell them, afraid that they would say that I knew something about the murder."

Then as she finished, he bent over and placed his hand on her dark hair, letting it rest there while he said,

" Yes, that is true, Mrs. Underwood, but now try and forget it all. It was a mistake, a foolish one, but one that I think will cause no harm."

He turned as if to go, took his watch from his pocket, glanced at it, and turning to me said, " Pelt, I wish you would take a car and go up to town immediately and get a dictaphone. If there is none in town get an old-fashioned phonograph with the round records, the old style. It must be here before six o'clock. But get something, and be quick as you can."

I went to the garage immediately and got a car. The run was quickly made, and I found a stationery store that were agents for dictaphones. They had none in stock, but called up a man to whom they had sold one.

It was in use, but he said he would be finished with it by five-thirty. And the agent promised faithfully to call for it himself and bring it down to the Underwood home before six o'clock.

When I returned I found Bartley in our rooms. He was changing his clothes. To my call he gave a cheery answer, and then asked, "Well, what do you think of the story you heard this afternoon?"

I had been thinking of it ever since I had heard it. For some reason I had never thought that Mrs. Underwood had anything to tell us of value. I had even thought that Bartley's little talk about her finding the gun, and hiding it, was on his part a wild guess. So I had been, as the saying is, taken off my feet by what she had said. Some of it seemed so clear that I wondered why it was that I had not discovered it myself. Other parts of her story had made me wonder if there might not be some other application that could be made of the facts that she had given us. All this I expressed in answer to his question, and he listened without even a smile. When I had finished, he said,

"I agree with you in part, but I think there is no doubt that she told us the truth. I confess that I did not think she had been married before; that startled me. I did know that there was something in her life that she had not told her husband, and that was the thing that was troubling him."

I smiled to myself as I listened. I knew that Bartley was now producing his theory of what Underwood's dreams had meant, and that he was going a bit beyond the truth, when he used the words "I did know." But I listened while he continued,

"You can see, Pelt, how Underwood would feel. He was a man that prided himself on his honour and reputation. No scandal had ever touched his life. It had been as clean as the hound's tooth. But here comes a thing that not only touches his name, but, what is worse, causes the whole world to gloat at his disgrace. He was in a sense an old man, who had married a young and a very beautiful show girl. At the time it made talk; it

caused his son to feel ashamed of him. Now he finds out that she had been married before, that she did not tell of her divorce when she got her licence, that she swore under oath to a lie. Then he finds out that her divorce was not a legal one in the state in which they were married, and that she had no legal right to marry there. In other words that she was not his wife according to New York law. Now our divorce laws are so mixed that if some one did not take this matter up, why it would not have made much difference. But here comes her husband, through his brother, and says that he will sue her for divorce himself. Remember, if he wished to press the claim, her first husband could prove that under the laws of the New York she was still his wife, and he could sue her for divorce in that state, and name Underwood as co-respondent. A nice mess when you look at it. No wonder he would try to hush the thing up, be willing to pay money to do it. Those items in that little red notebook were, I think, the items that he put down of the money that he gave Ransome. A nice mess, and now that he is dead and the will does prove to be missing, if any one wishes to cause trouble they could cause her to lose her dower right in his property, simply by saying that she had no legal right to marry him in New York, and that the marriage was never legal. Again, I say a nice mess to get into, and absolutely her own fault, though, when she married him, I have no doubt but that she believed her divorce legal in New York."

"And if the will is found?"

"There I think Underwood was borrowing trouble. I do not believe any court would throw out her bequest. Underwood married her in good faith, and willed her property as his wife. There would be no question, as I see it, in the mind of the court as to the person intended in such a bequest. Moreover, if Mrs. Underwood could prove that he had learned of the technical difficulty of the legality of his marriage and had had time to change his will and had not done so—obviously it would mean that he had willed it to her whether his marriage were

legal or not. I should say, therefore, that if the will turns up she is safe enough—if not her position is doubtful. Perhaps Robert could break the will, but I doubt it. No one else would want to."

"Unless it might be one or both of the Ransomes."

"Which would be shutting off the supply at the fountain head," smiled Bartley.

"What part do you think," I asked, "has Ransome played in the matter?"

"That of a blackmailer," said Bartley in disgust. "I would not be surprised if, when all is discovered, her first husband never had anything to do with it at all. I have the idea that Ransome, who knew of the divorce, put up the whole game himself, as an easy way to get money out of Underwood. I may be mistaken, but I have an idea that is about what is back of it. Anyway, I am going up to see him right away, and when I have finished with him the third degree will look tame. I know that he will in the end tell all he knows. I am going to inform him that we saw him shoot Vance, and that we both will testify that he murdered him. I will tell him of the conversation that you heard on the beach. And then just to make it interesting will inform him that we have found his brother and that he says he had nothing to do with blackmailing Underwood. Then I will offer to drop the murder charge and the blackmail charge, if he tells the truth."

He grinned as he said this, and I decided that I would not want to be in Ransome's shoes for the next hour or so. But just as he was about to go, I asked another question,

"Is there any chance that he killed Underwood, that it was his gun?"

He paused by the door, and shook his head.

"If he did, he had two guns. The gun that killed Vance was like that one under Robert's bed. But that proves nothing. His blackmail would be ended with Underwood dead."

"Unless he thought money from the wife would be easier to get."

"But in that case—who stole the will? If the judge and Mrs. Underwood are telling the truth the will was on his desk or in the safe when he was killed."

"And may have been stolen then, or at the time you were knocked on the head. Give it up, Pelt, and take it easy. I'm going to run up and grill Ransome. Perhaps you will find out something to-night."

"But," I said, "I thought you said you were to drop the case to-night?"

He gave me a quizzical glance. "Did I?" was all he said.

As we reached the hall, we ran into Williams, with a light summer overcoat on his arm. Seeing me glance at it, he ventured to inform us that it was Mr. Phelps's, and that he was going to send it over to the hotel. But Bartley told him that Phelps would be at the house in the evening and that he could give it to him then.

He was fumbling in his pocket for his cigar case as he spoke, but did not find it, and I suggested that he must have left it in his other clothes and that I would run up and get it. But he said that he had seen a cigar case in Phelps's coat, and that he would steal a couple of his, which he did, then going out to the garage, where in a few moments a chauffeur started with him for Eastwood.

Rather lazy, and wondering a bit how much Bartley knew, I went down the steps to the foot of the sea wall and flung myself down on the sand for the tide was out. There I lay in the late afternoon sun for over an hour, watching the children playing, and the gulls sweeping down for fish. It was not till I looked at my watch and saw that it was after six, and some minutes after the dinner hour, that I rose to my feet.

As I walked the few yards back towards the steps I spied a shining black object protruding from the sand. I dug at it with my toe and unearthed a dictaphone cylinder. Considering the interest that Bartley had attached to the finding of the dictaphone I decided to take this up to him, wondering meanwhile, if the new dictaphone had arrived from town. As I entered my room I heard queer noises coming through Bartley's

door. I opened it, and as I did so caught faintly the words, "Buy steel at 104," coming from the dictaphone, But I heard no more, for the moment the door opened, even before, Bartley, who was bending over the dictaphone on his desk turned to see who it was, stopped the dictaphone, and then straightened himself and turned to see who was at the door.

"Some more music for you," I said, handing him my sand-covered dictaphone record.

He looked at it and then at me rather foolishly. "By George," was all he said, and he took the record and proceeded with it to the washbowl.

But I did not wait, for I was hungry, and I returned to my room and shortly afterwards went down to dinner.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DRAMATIST ALSO TALKS

I ATE rather hurriedly and went again upstairs. The dictaphone had been covered over and set aside. Bartley, with the air of a man who was weary, sat in an armchair by the desk, puffing at his pipe. As I came in, he looked up and said with an inquiring look,

"Well?"

"What about Ransome?" I asked.

He grinned when I mentioned Ransome's name; a grin that expressed a great deal. Then throwing one leg over the arm of his chair, he stated the story.

"Ransome, just at present, is a sad man. I think a very frightened man also. When I got to his cell, he greeted me as if he had not seen a human face for a month. You know that I gave orders to allow no one to see him, or any papers to be given him. The result was that he knew nothing of what had happened the last few hours, or, for that matter, why he was held in jail. All he knew was that they found the necklace, but he

had no idea what the police thought about it. Well, he had been left alone, in that damp, musty jail, in a dark cell, with no one to speak to him, and all messages that he wished to send being refused. The result was that his nerves began to get the better of him. He was wondering why they were holding him, and I have the idea that his imagination was acting rather rapidly. He is that kind, Pelt—you know the type—that make up our lesser criminals, and who lack nerve for any kind of bravery. So when I came in, he was overjoyed to see me. Then he started to explain, wanted to know why they held him, why they would not let him see any one. So I thought he might as well have something to think of, and said that it was what they always did when holding a man for murder."

Bartley chuckled at the recollection.

"He wilted when I said that, just as a cur does that has been beaten, and gasped, 'Murder, my God, what do they mean?' I simply answered, 'Vance,' and this seemed to terrify him more than the first statement I made. Then, after a while, he began to bluster, and to threaten what he would do. I think, among other things, he said he would sue the town for malicious prosecution, and things like that. And then I informed him that I thought they had a good case against him, and that both you and I had seen the shooting."

He gave a little grin, and continued,

"That was almost the last straw, for I did not enlighten him as to where we were, but said that we saw it all. He thought that we must have followed him. I don't think he had any idea that we were in the house, and I judge that his guilty conscience got to work. Then, to clear himself as best he could, he said that he did not know Vance, and I retorted that you would testify that he talked with him on the shore two nights before Vance was killed, and, to keep him on the anxious seat, I told him what you had heard. Well, that finished him. He was scared through and through. He is a yellow cur, anyway, and it finished him. Then I asked him what he thought a jury would say to his story of not knowing

Vance, when you were able to testify that he asked him to go into the house. He never saw the flaws in the evidence against him, the fact that no night was mentioned, and that he would not know what night Vance would come, nor did he see that it was almost impossible to prove that the shooting was not accidental. He never thought of these things, only his guilty conscience was working. So I left him alone for a few moments to think the matter over. When I returned he was worse than ever. He even wept as he said he did not murder Vance, though he did admit that he knew him. Well, then I decided that it was time to give him another jolt. So I told him that we could prove against him the Severance robbery, told of finding his scarf pin and the little booklet with the marked house. Then added that the New York police also had connected him with jewellery robberies."

"He must have been feeling rather sick by that time," I ventured.

Bartley nodded, grinning,

"He was a mighty sick man, and a very much surprised one. But I concluded that it was time he got all I had to say, and suddenly shot at him that we were also going to get after him for blackmailing Underwood. I told him that Underwood had had detectives on him for weeks, and I made a guess, and said that we could prove the money that he had taken had never reached his brother. Then, to finish him, I said that when the police heard of his blackmail stunt they decided that he had killed Underwood. Of course, the last was not true, and he did not know that the police knew nothing about the blackmailing of Underwood."

"And what did he say to all this?" I asked eagerly.

"Nothing. He was too far gone to say a word. It was like a blow on the head; one that had stunned him. In fact, he sat on his bed in his cell, trembling, gone absolutely to pieces. Then I grabbed him by the shoulder and told him that I cared nothing about the other things, but that I would send him up for the murder."

He gave a disgusted gesture.

"I hated the whole thing. He was a worthless piece of humanity, the kind that pretend to practise some art to cover up generally rotten lines. I also told him that they hung people for murder in Rhode Island. Another lie, for which may God forgive me. And then I reminded him that I was pretty well known, and that my testimony in the box would finish him. That statement did. He gave a shriek and fell on his knees at my feet, saying he did not kill Vance, but, of course, that was excitement, which he changed by saying that he did not murder him. And he begged me to save him."

"You never intended to testify against him for the killing of Vance," I remonstrated.

"No, for though I doubt if he tells the truth when he says he did not murder him, yet I don't think any jury would convict him on the evidence. So then, while he was grovelling on his knees, I told him that if he would tell the truth about the Underwood matter and the robbery, I would see that the charge of murder was dropped. Well, of course, he took it, like a fish at a fly. He never saw that I could not know all the details if I was asking him for them, or that the Underwood family would hardly wish that story of the head of the family in the courts, by proceeding against him for blackmail. All he saw was a chance to save his neck. The fact he was willing to take it, proves to my mind that he murdered Vance. So he told me all he knew."

"It must have been quite a story," I said.

"No," he answered, "it was not much of a story at that; simply a sordid story of petty blackmail. It seems that one day last spring he ran into his brother in New York. They got talking, and he asked his brother why he did not get some money out of Underwood, telling him that the marriage was illegal. He happened to know this, because he read in the paper of a similar case and at once he thought of Mrs. Underwood. His brother, who seemed to be, from what I heard, a better sort of chap than I thought, said he had no reason to do anything of the kind, and besides he was married again himself."

In astonishment I asked, " Married ? "

He smiled at my astonishment and answered,

" Yes, married ; that, of course, would block him from sueing Mrs. Underwood for divorce, even if he had wished to. But from what I got, the brother had nothing to do with the whole affair. Ransome thought it over. He had met Underwood in some manner, and one day told him about the first marriage, saying his brother was going to make trouble over it, and suggested that he try to fix the matter. Well, you can see how that would strike Underwood. He would want to keep the matter hid and was willing to let Ransome, as he said, ' fix it.' So he got money out of him a number of times, saying each time that his brother insisted on it. Then, thinking that Underwood might think that the story was not exactly true, he told him that his brother was going to sue Mrs. Underwood for a divorce in the State of New York. He had given enough proofs so that Underwood knew that his wife had been married and that the divorce would not be called legal if the question was ever raised in court. So he was willing enough to believe the story that the husband was to sue him also. Just how far the matter would have gone I don't know, for he told Underwood that his brother said that if he gave him three thousand dollars more he would leave the country. I have an idea that Underwood would sooner or later have discovered that it was actually a case of blackmail, and I have the idea that he thought so, towards the end. Anyway the three thousand dollars that Vance spoke about was the last money given Ransome, and it was given on the evening that Mr. Underwood was killed. He gave it to him, himself, about nine o'clock, on the piazza of his house."

" But," I suggested, " it seems strange that Mrs. Underwood would allow him around after she knew that story, or that Underwood would have him in the house himself."

Bartley agreed, but added,

" Yes, but you must remember that Underwood was given the impression by Ransome that he was much

ashamed of his brother, that he was trying to shield Mrs. Underwood, and that he was the good friend that was doing all the dirty work. Also Mrs. Underwood later was afraid that he might tell. In fact, there is no doubt that he would have blackmailed her later."

"But what did he say about the robbery?" I asked.

"Not much. He admitted it, said that Vance had been in it, that Vance watched in the front of the house while he climbed up the trestle. He also added that Vance got scared at something, and ran back to the house. You remember that we met him."

It seemed hard to believe that Vance, a college man, should turn out to be a thief, and I said as much, but Bartley did not agree.

"The criminal streak is a funny one, and it hits all classes. Vance had a fine chance, as the secretary of Underwood, to get into the homes of the people. He would have opportunities of finding out where they kept their valuables, and no one would ever suspect him. Just how he and Ransome ever got together in the first place I don't know, but they did, and it was Vance that, as a rule, got rid of what they took. I don't know how many robberies they were in. He confessed to the last two that took place down here, but denied that they had anything to do with any more."

He reached for his pipe, which had gone out, and lighted it again; then suddenly gave a start, and said,

"Oh, I forgot, Felt, to tell you that Vance was the man that gave you that knock on the head, the night you went to the library."

In astonishment I gasped, "It was?"

Blowing a ring of smoke from his pipe, he nodded back at me,

"Yes. That's a strange thing also. Vance came round and told Ransome about the three thousand dollars that was missing. Now, Ransome had that money in his desk, but he could not tell Vance that—it meant letting him into the graft. So when Vance said that it must be in the safe, and that no one had been able to open the safe, he after a while persuaded him to

come to the house that night and see if together they could not get it. Ransome did not wish to do that. He had the money, and he was afraid that he would be discovered. But what could he do? He had to go. I don't see myself just how Vance thought he could open the safe. I judge he thought that Underwood himself had closed it, with a combination they used before. Anyway, he left a window open, and Ransome came in that way. They had not been in the library long when you came in and the fight started. It was Vance that hit you. From what Ransome says they were unable to do anything with the safe, and were just on the point of giving it up when you arrived. After the shot, which Ransome fired, he managed to get to the front of the house, just about the time I reached the room, and out of the window he went, pulling it down after him. I wondered myself if Vance might not have known a little about that affair, for he was all dressed, and in the library soon after I was."

He rose to his feet, laying the pipe on the desk; then he gave a look at his watch. A surprised look came over his face, and he turned, asking,

"Had your dinner?"

"Yes, before I came up."

At first he thought he would go down to the dining-room, but then he decided that it was a little late, and that Williams could bring up a lunch. He rang, and in a moment Williams appeared, knocking at the door and entering when Bartley called out. When asked if he thought he would be able to bring a lunch for Bartley, he answered that he would have it up in a few minutes. After he left the room, Bartley turned to the desk and moved the dictaphone to one side, to make ready for the dishes that were to come. That finished, he remembered that he had something else to tell me, and said,

"I forgot, Pelt, to say that Ransome signed a statement that contained the story that I told you. He was mighty glad to do so; glad that his precious neck had been saved."

"Well," I answered, "that will save Mrs. Underwood a lot of trouble."

"Yes, if the will is found. But she made a sad mistake when she did not tell the story to her husband when she married him."

By this time Williams had again knocked at the door, and when he entered he wheeled before him a tea cart, covered with white linen under which could be seen the shapes of dishes. He wheeled it over to Bartley's side, took off the long white cloth that covered the food and the percolator. Then, asking if there was anything else that he wished, he left.

Bartley had suggested a light lunch, but it turned out to be a dinner—a dinner to which Bartley did justice, as he must have been hungry.

The meal over, he started to busy himself in placing various things in a suitcase which he took from his closet.

"That," he said, as he tossed in the revolver, "is the gun that did the deed. I don't think there is any doubt of that."

I was willing to agree to that, but there was one thing that I could say.

"But you don't know who bought it!"

He picked up some other articles, covered with a cloth, which he placed in the suitcase, and then answered my question.

"No. But Jimmy Ryan will be here to-night, perhaps he will."

Bartley laughed when he saw my face, and a moment later closed the suitcase and placed it on the floor. Then he went over to the desk and took a little red-covered book and started to read. Before he turned his attention to the book he drawled out,

"By the way, Pelt, if any one to-night should try to get out of the library without our seeing them, let them go. Remember."

What he intended to convey was not very clear, though I judged that some one might try to get out of the library while Bartley was holding his conference,

and if they did, I was to make no effort to prevent them.

When I looked at him again he was deep in his book, reading as if he did not expect in several hours to explain how a murder had been committed and who the murderer was. For the time being the crime was forgotten, and Bartley was far away, in his book, which I saw, as I passed behind him to reach the door, was one of the volumes of Monsieur Nicholas, from Underwood's library.

When I reached the main floor, noticing a light in the library, I went in. There was no one there—the great room in the dim light seemed lonely, and the shadows by the windows were rather depressing. I turned on more of the electric lights, till the room was ablaze, and then spent some time looking at the pictures on the wall. In truth, I cared nothing for the pictures. I had seen them before, but the thoughts of the next few hours were unnerving. I knew that within an hour or so we would all be in this room, and that Bartley would unfold to us what he had discovered. But it was this fact that made me nervous. Even on this night, when Bartley inferred the murderer would be named, I was thinking that the case was even more mysterious than it was on the first night that we came to the house. For myself, I had tried to picture who the murderer might be, but each time my theories had brought me nowhere. I had started by thinking that it might be the son, then later I had changed to Vance, then Ransome. I had even a vague suspicion that Mrs. Underwood might be the guilty one. But now I had to admit that, so far as I could see, there was nothing but mystery about the case. Even my theories for the motive had vanished, for with the fact that Robert had no need of money on the night of the crime, and in face of the truth that his father had increased his legacies in his new will, that Judge Grant was to draw up, the motive on his part vanished. And to-night I said to myself that I had not even discovered a motive for the crime. Yet somehow I believed that Bartley was prepared to name the

murderer in a little while. I gave a sigh, and then jumped as some one spoke my name. Turning, I saw Phelps, his clean-shaven face smiling at me, and his voice cheery as he said,

"Well, Mr. Pelt, this case has proven too much for Mr. Bartley."

I started to say that it had not, and then I remembered that he told me not to repeat what he said about knowing the murderer, so I simply replied,

"It seems so."

Phelps gave a smile, saying,

"I never thought Bartley would fall down on it. Now I judge we will drop all efforts to find the criminal, and leave the case in the hands of the local police."

"And," I suggested, "God knows it will never leave their hands."

He laughed, "I think you are right."

Then telling me that he would be in the library about nine, he went out, as he told me, in search of his client, Robert.

After that I went out to the sea wall, and finding a chair, drew it up to the edge of the wall. It was a sheer drop of at least forty feet to the sand below, which, under the light of the moon, was gleaming white in the light. Across the water I could see the red light on the mast of some little vessel, and nearer the shore the lights of a tug. From far away there came every thirty seconds the flashes from the lighthouses, and once in a while I heard the whistle of a steamer. The moon, now just up, cast a path of light across the sea—a path that went on till it seemed to reach the sky itself. So, watching the sea and the moonlight, I sat smoking till I was aroused by District Attorney Sullivan's voice. "Well, Pelt, who knocked you out since I saw you last?"

I rose to my feet, and Sullivan was standing by me. After our hands met he drew a chair to my side and seated himself. After lighting his cigar he turned to me,

"What has your chief found out?"

"I don't know," I answered. "I think he is going to give us his idea of who committed the crime." He did

not answer for a while, nor say a word, but sat watching the glowing tip of his cigar. Then he said shrewdly,

"He sent word for me to be here; said I would like to hear what he had found out. I mistrusted then that even John Bartley could lay his hand on the right man this time. Anyway, in a little while, we will know."

I made no answer, and for a while we both watched the moonlight. Then he said,

"I just saw Bartley. He was reading, reading a book in a foreign language, just as if there were not good books in your own tongue. I asked him what he had to tell me about the things he had discovered, and he said, 'Run down and talk to Pelt.'"

I chuckled to myself at the picture of the district attorney trying to get Bartley to give out advance information, and also trying to get him to lay down his book. I had the idea also that Bartley had sent him down to me because I did not know anything worth the telling. So I discussed with Sullivan what I knew about Ransome, and about the death of Vance, but I said nothing about Mrs. Underwood being married the first time, or about her divorce. He waited till I finished, which took some minutes, then remarked,

"I think you are right about the death of Vance being murder. It looks like it, and it looks as if he sent him in there, to give him a chance to kill him, and then say he was a burglar. That man Ransome is a bad actor."

What more he might have said, I do not know, for Williams came at this point and said that Mr. Bartley, as he put it, was waiting our pleasure in the library. We both rose to our feet at once. The time had come, and we were eager to hear what Bartley might say. Just as we reached the house we ran into the little red-headed Irish messenger boy that had secured the revolver.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LAST WORDS OF JOHN UNDERWOOD

IT was a serious-looking crowd that we found in the library. No one knew what Bartley wished them to be there for. Mrs. Underwood was seated by the side of Robert, and they were the most cheerful looking people in the room. In fact, the smile that the young man gave me was one that seemed to say that, whatever the evening might bring forth, it would have no terrors for him. I judged also that he and his step-mother must have come closer together, their differences, which after all did not amount to much, apparently had been settled. I found later from Bartley that he had advised Mrs. Underwood to tell Robert what she had told us, and that she had done so.

Phelps was over by the side of the fireplace, dressed in an evening suit, which seemed to be a little out of place. But I was willing to admit that he made a fine picture of a man, his figure showing off the suit to the best advantage. For a while he stood by the fireplace, but later went over before the great windows, which were open, and took a chair there.

To my surprise, both Judge Grant and the chief of the Eastwood police were also present, and the chief was decidedly uncomfortable. In fact, from his fugitive air, and the nervous way in which he kept casting his eyes around the room, one might have actually thought that he was the criminal himself, expecting exposure. Of course the judge was not ill at ease, still I could see that he was wondering, like the rest, why Bartley had called them together.

Sullivan and myself were the only others in the room, and I took a chair near the bookcase which contained the works of Bretonne, while the chief, who must have had some understanding with Bartley, waited at the desk for him.

The curious thing about the group of people was the fact that, besides Robert and Mrs. Underwood, none of them got anywhere near each other. All sat in different parts of the room, far away from any one else. And there was no talking, no speaking to each other, while smiles were absolutely absent. In fact, over the room hung the air of suspense, a suspense that I myself shared.

After Bartley entered the room, and after the first quick glance that all gave him, I noticed that for a moment they did not look at him. He walked over to the desk, and Williams laid the suitcase on its surface, and then after a word from Bartley left the room, closing the door after him.

For a second after the door closed Bartley stood by the desk, simply giving one quick look around the room ; a look that rested for a moment on the face of each one of us, and then passed on to the next. What was he thinking of ? I would have given a good deal to know. His features showed that he was tired ; but he was no longer the Bartley that they had seen and talked with during the past few days. I think they all recognized that. It was a new Bartley that stood before them ; not the man that had laughed and smiled with them, but the man that was called the shrewdest criminal detective in the country. His face was serious, his eyes were gleaming, and yet I thought for a moment that back of his expression was a bit of sadness. So for a short time that seemed endless he stood by the desk, and then throwing back his shoulders he began to speak, his voice low, yet with an intensity that carried it to the soul of every one in the room.

He began by saying that some of us might wonder why he had called us together, but that others might wonder why he had not done it before. He then said that he made it a point never to speak about his cases until either he had reached a conclusion that solved the case or had decided that he could see no light in it.

The room was silent while he spoke, the only sound being the soft flapping of the curtains at the windows, stirred by the breeze from without. All were intent

upon his words. Sullivan by his side, stood looking at the floor, without any expression of any sort upon his face. Phelps was leaning back in his chair, looking intently at the great ruby of his ring. The others, Mrs. Underwood and Robert, together with the Eastwood chief of police and the attorney, were gazing at Bartley. All were serious enough, and I judge that every one felt a little uncomfortable. He had paused for a moment, allowing his gaze to sweep the room, and then he said slowly, "And to-night, I am able to finish this case."

This statement seemed to be unexpected, but it was one that carried more than one meaning. Yet I knew that Bartley felt that he had solved the mystery; but the others did not know that, and I presume they may have thought that he meant that he was to drop out of the case. So all were keen for his next words.

"I admit," he said, "that this case, the death of Mr. Underwood, presented some of the most puzzling circumstances that I have ever gone up against. From the moment that he was found dead up until to-day, there have been things that seemed unexplainable. But to-night I have asked you to come here because you are the ones most interested in the matter, and to listen while I explain what I have found out."

Somebody at this point gave a little sigh, but who it was I could not tell, but the next second the room was silent. Bartley's face was very grave as he continued.

"I think we all agree that Mr. Underwood was murdered. There is no need to enter into the reasons why I think that, nor why I expect you to agree. The reasons are patent enough. The fact that no revolver was found in the library the morning after his death, the testimony of the doctor, who said that it was impossible that he could have killed himself, and other matters which will be brought out, all these things prove that it was murder. There is no need to go into that matter more fully."

He turned towards Phelps, saying, "Don't you agree with me, Mr. Phelps?"

The lawyer did not speak, but simply nodded his head in agreement.

"The first thing we look for in a murder," continued Bartley, "is the motive—the reason why the man was killed. There is always a reason, and unless we find it we can never go very far in solving a mystery of this kind." He was silent a moment, and then said slowly,

"The motive I will take up later."

I think that it was at this time that they began to understand that Bartley had solved the case, and that he did not intend to drop it, and one could tell that by the look on their faces. The chief from Eastwood turned and looked a question at the attorney, who shook his head. Phelps, with a rather puzzled look on his face, stopped playing with his ring. All waited for Bartley to tell what he had found. He seemed in no hurry to speak; in fact, he acted as if the whole thing was distasteful to him. But at last he continued,

"I heard it said, by several, that in this case there was no chance of ever solving it, because even if we agreed that Mr. Underwood was murdered, yet the murderer did not leave any clue. That of course is absurd. There has never been a crime in which the criminal did not leave some trace behind. Mr. Sullivan will agree with me. This case is no exception from the rule."

This seemed to be news to the Eastwood chief, for the astonished look on his face would have been laughable at any other time. Still they all looked surprised, and Phelps seemed to share the surprise with the rest, lawyer that he was.

"Let me try," continued Bartley, "to reconstruct what happened the night that Underwood was killed. He had been working in his library. It must have been some time after eleven, when, I think, the door open from the hall. I would say that for a moment he did not observe that any one was in the room, and when he did look up he was surprised, wondering, I presume, how any one got in without having the butler knock to warn him. Now I do not think that it was any one that he expected to see. He had no appointment with him. I did think that at first but do not believe so now. Doubtless he gave expression to his surprise, but as the person

was some one that he knew they later must have talked for a while. I know that from the cigars that they smoked. Then there was a short quarrel, and suddenly the man from across the desk shot him, killing him at once. I think the man waited a moment or so, to see if the shot had alarmed any one, but the wind was blowing and the heavy surf on the shore would have drowned the sound of the shot. The murderer then went over to Underwood's side to see if he was dead, then went to the safe; later he turned out the light, and left the room."

He paused. The description had been so realistic, that I well understood when I heard the chief say to the attorney, "My God, you would think he saw it all."

But the last words were what held the attention of all. How had the man left the room. And then Bartley spoke,

"He left the room through the window," and he waved his hand to the window back of Phelps's chair.

For a moment there fell a silence. I think we all turned and looked at the window as if we expected to see a man climbing out. But the next moment Phelps asked the question that we all were thinking,

"How could he leave by the window when it was locked?"

For the first time, Bartley smiled.

"It was not locked."

"But," said the chief, and in his eagerness his words fell over each other, "how could he? It was locked. They all said so."

"I know," said Bartley, "but it could not have been locked the night of the murder. Now remember this. The windows and the door were found locked the next morning. Vance, Williams and Mrs. Underwood all testified to that. But one fact is clear. Underwood was murdered in this room. The murderer has to escape; he did not go out by the door. It was found locked on the inside with the key in it. He could not lock it so from the outside, and leave the key inside. Only the window was left. As it was impossible to get out by the door, and as the murderer did leave the room, he had to leave it by the window. There was no other way."

We were all a bit confused, for we remembered the testimony of all that the windows were locked also. Sullivan spoke of this, but Bartley did not wait for him to finish, saying,

"No, Mr. Sullivan, the witnesses did not lie. As far as they knew, they told the truth. But one window was not locked."

This seemed even worse for us than his other statement. I could see that Phelps did not agree with him, and I myself could not see how Williams and Vance could have told the truth, and yet one window be unlocked as he said. He saw the disbelief in our eyes, and explained,

"Now I want you to put yourself in the place of Vance and Williams. They had found that Mr. Underwood had not been seen since the evening before. They found the door locked. They then went to the windows outside, and looked in the room. They were on a ladder, and they saw Mr. Underwood was at his desk, and did not answer when they knocked on the glass. Naturally they were nervous and excited. They tried the window, the ladder was almost in the middle of the three. The first one did not move ; they saw it was locked. They tried the second ; that also was locked, and did not move. They tried the third, and to do so had to lean from the ladder so they were just able to reach the sash. Williams tells me they never moved the ladder. The third window did not move."

He paused here for a second, a second that seemed endless for we all were waiting breathless for his next sentence.

"So, naturally, as that window had not moved, they concluded that it was locked also. It was the thing we all would do. We had tried two windows, they had not moved, and looking through the glass we saw that the catch was on. We tried the third window ; it does not move like the others, but we do not see the catch. The fact that it did not move, and that the other did not and were locked, is enough for us to conclude that it was locked also."

Sullivan, over whose face a faint smile had been dawning, nodded his agreement to this. But there was still

a little doubt in my mind if Bartley was right. His theory was good, but it needed facts to back it. As if understanding my doubts he said,

"After I looked the room over, the day I was called in, I decided that the murderer must have gone out of the window ; there was no other way to leave the room. The testimony of the witnesses, I heard first then, naturally I wondered a bit. But I knew the murderer had to leave the room, and somewhere there must be a flaw in what they said. So I myself took a ladder and tried the windows. And I found that the third window stuck, stuck so badly that it would require a good deal of force to raise it. Now that explained why Vance and Williams said it was locked. They tried to raise it, it did not move, and at once they assumed that it must be locked. After what they had found regarding the first two they tried to open, it was the natural thing to do. They were honest enough. If they had placed their ladder directly by the third window they would have opened it, but leaning over from the other window where they were it was impossible. The window stuck, and did not open easily."

"But——" broke in Phelps.

Bartley turned on him : "I know what you are going to say. But they said they found it locked when they looked at it after they had come in the room. They did, but so far as I can see the window was not looked at right away. The excitement of finding Underwood dead drove all other thoughts from their minds. Williams tells me that he went first to the window, and tried the locks of each one. I judge that the lock must have been half turned, but not caught, and that he might have done what he did with the others, try it to see if it was turned on tight. He can't say, he was all upset by what had happened. But it is a fact that he was the first one to look at the windows after they came in the room. Not knowing just what he did, he might have simply turned the window lock of that third window till it was like the others, or else some one did turn it on, wishing us to think that the window was locked, turned it on after they

were in the room. But that is not very important. The fact is that the murderer got out by the window. There was no other way. Then, standing on the broad ledge, he reached back and pulled it down. And the fact also remains that out of that window went the murderer, there was no other way to go out."

It was reasonable enough, now that he had explained it, clear enough for us all to see; so clear that I blushed because I had not thought of that explanation myself. But there was no time to run that over in my mind, for Bartley was speaking again.

"So the murderer went out of the window, and ran along the stone paving near the top of the sea wall—and threw an object into the sea." Bartley turned toward the suitcase; in the eyes that followed one could almost see the pictured revolver rusted by salt water—for Mrs. Underwood and myself were the only ones present that knew the truth about the finding of the revolver—and yet I knew that no revolver had been thrown over the sea wall.

So I was the most surprised of the group when Bartley brought forth a revolver that he held in his hands.

"This," he said, "is the gun that killed Underwood."

He let the crowd stare at the gun for a few seconds and then continued: "This is not the object, however, that the murderer threw into the sea. I found this gun in the house the day I came here. There is no doubt that this is the gun with which Mr. Underwood was shot. The bullet that was found in his wound fitted this gun. The gun had been fired only a few hours before I found it, and the fact that it was hidden, together with the rest of the circumstances surrounding this gun, leave little doubt that he was shot with it."

"But where was the gun found?" stammered the chief of police.

"In this room," replied Bartley. "I did not find it here, but some one else did and removed it and hid it elsewhere in this house, where I did find it."

A murmur of surprise and disapproval came from the men present. It was Phelps who spoke.

"You say the gun was found in this room when it was broken into?"

"I said it was found, in fact, lying on the floor beside Mr. Underwood's chair."

"Bosh," said Phelps. "Then your case is ridiculous. That proves suicide, and with nothing but your theory of the unlocked window—and that contradicted by two witnesses. The whole case against the suicide theory has rested on the absence of the revolver from the room.

"I expected some one here to say as much at this point of my revelation," answered Bartley. "It is true that the gun that killed Underwood was found lying on the floor by his side—where, had he shot himself, it would have fallen from his hand." Bartley paused, and waited for a few seconds, and then added, "And where any one else who might have shot him, and who was not altogether panic-stricken, would have had sense enough to place it."

Neither Phelps, nor any one else, replied to this, and Bartley continued,

"This gun was bought in May, in the town of Eastwood. Mrs. Underwood and Mr. Underwood were here at the time, to get their summer home opened for the season. The gun was bought while they were here. I have proven that, and it is not necessary to tell how I did it at this time. I can later, at the proper time, prove through the boy that bought the gun, who the person was that sent him to the store for it. I am not sure if the person that bought the gun in May intended then to kill Underwood. In fact, the mere buying of the gun proves very little. If that was all the evidence that there was against the person that bought it, he could very easily disclaim all knowledge of the crime. But it is not all."

Again he paused, and again each one looked at the other. For the suspense was becoming intense. Bartley was so serious, his voice so grave, that it seemed only a question of seconds before he would name the person that he suspected of the murder. And all were wondering whom he would name. No one spoke, or, for that

matter, even whispered; the silence that came when he paused not being broken by a sound.

Again Bartley placed his hand within the suitcase and drew forth a large square envelope. All eyes were upon him as he slowly drew from it what looked, from where I was sitting, to be a number of photographs. What they were of, I could not see. He laid them down on the table, and spoke again,

"In every murder to-day we look for finger prints. The clever criminals guard against leaving this sort of a clue by wearing gloves. But it was not a professional criminal that committed this crime. And we naturally looked for finger prints, and found them."

"But, Mr. Bartley," asked Phelps, "would such evidence be worth much in this case? You told me that you did not see the room till some hours after the crime had been committed. In that length of time there had been so many people in the room, that I should think that you might find finger prints almost anywhere. And such being the case, they would not be of much value."

Bartley listened carefully till he finished, then replied,

"That is, of course, true; there were so many in the room, so many hands on various things, that a finger print would not be of much value that was taken hours after the crime. But"—and his voice took on a new tone, and rang through the room—"there was one place that the murderer would be sure to leave his finger print, one place that no one else would touch, one place that would settle the question if we found such a print there."

Sullivan, bursting with excitement, asked, "Where was that?"

"Before the murderer left the room he went over and put out the light. To leave it burning all night might cause some one to wonder. So he put it out. To do so, what did he have to do? Remember how the lights are turned on here. By a push button. To put out the light he had to push that button. Most of us do it with our thumbs, so did this man. But when he did so, and his fingers were moist from the cigar that

he had smoked, he left the imprint of his thumb there. And there I found it. That was the one place that no one that was in the room during the day would touch. No one would turn on the lights ; there would be no need of it, the room was light enough. Other places in the room, the desk, the windows, the safe, had many finger prints, where many hands had been placed during the day. But the button that turned off the lights would have but one, the print of the thumb of the man that killed Mr. Underwood."

He took one of the pictures and held it up. It represented the print of the ball of a thumb, enlarged many times.

"And that," he said, "is a picture of the thumb mark that was on the button. Only one person in the world has a thumb that will leave that mark, and that is the person that killed Mr. Underwood."

Bartley placed the photograph back in the envelope. Then he took from the case several other envelopes, a mass of typewritten papers, gazed at them a moment, then placed them on the desk.

"You might say," he began, "that the finger print may not be that of the person that I think it is. But it will be an easy matter to prove that when I am ready. You may go further and say that the finger print is not enough upon which to convict a man of murder. I agree with that. But if the finger print turns out to be that of the same man that bought the gun, then we have gone a long way towards connecting the man with the crime. But"—and then his voice became a little more stern—"that is not all."

He paused for a moment and went over to Sullivan and whispered in his ear. What he said I could not hear, but the next moment Sullivan left the room. Then Bartley turned to us again, saying,

"It seems almost at times as if there is indeed a providence that watches over men, confronts the guilty and punishes those that sin. In this case the greatest proof is like a voice from the dead, a piece of evidence the like of which I have never come across, and so far as

I know has never been used to convict a murderer. Strange to say, the criminal in this case attempted to destroy this evidence and failed. Yet he did not know that the evidence which he tried to destroy by throwing it into the sea was evidence that absolutely damns him. He probably threw it into the sea because he thought it would discount the theory of suicide which he prepared for by locking the door and leaving the gun as if it had fallen from Underwood's hand. Strangest of all, this remarkable piece of evidence was only found about three hours ago, and then by the merest chance. The tide was in when the murder was committed and was out at six o'clock to-night, when Mr. Pelt picked up from the sand at the foot of the sea wall a record from the dictaphone to which Underwood was dictating a letter at the time when the man who murdered him entered the room."

At this moment the door opened and Sullivan entered, followed by Williams, carrying the dictaphone that I had ordered sent down from Eastwood that afternoon.

Bartley tried the machine to see if it would work, then shut it off and turned to speak. It was clear that the climax was at hand. One look at Bartley's face told that, a face whose sternness was enough to frighten one. All saw that, and all listened without a sound, as he started to speak. Picking up from his suitcase a dictaphone record, he held the wax cylinder in his hand, then slipped it on the machine. Then he spoke,

"As some of those present know, Mr. Underwood, after his secretary had left for the evening, often dictated his letters to be written the next morning from the machine. On the night of the murder this machine was standing by his chair, near his desk. He was dictating what letters he had left. It was this work that he was engaged in when the murderer entered the room. In fact, he was at that very moment engaged in a letter, which he had half spoken into the machine. The murderer entered. Underwood, surprised, did not shut it off. Moreover, he continued to hold the speaking funnel in his hand. His surprise at the interruption instinctively he spoke,

and spoke loud enough for his words to be recorded, though the funnel was further from his mouth than in ordinary dictation. The next moment he stopped the machine. But, on the record, interrupting the half-completed letter, we find his words recorded, among them the name of the man who killed him."

"My God!" said the chief of police.

The rest of us merely looked on with amazement at the wax record that had recorded invisibly upon its surface the name of the man that had killed Underwood.

Bartley seemed a bit depressed, as if the next step was one that he did not wish to take. One could see that for some reason he was not finding his usual pleasure in his explanation of this case. But he spoke again,

"This machine was knocked on the floor, and many of the records in the receiving tray were broken. Later they were carried by Williams to the storeroom in order to clear up the rubbish. But the record on the machine was not broken, and was not destroyed, though it was removed by the murderer and thrown into the sea. Now if you will all come up to the desk, I will let you hear it. I wish you to say nothing, to do nothing to tell any other person in the room what you hear. I know it will be a hard thing for Mrs. Underwood and Robert Underwood to hear the voice of the man that they both loved. It will be a voice from the dead. But I wish them to hear it, and remember to say nothing until you all have finished."

Her face pale, Mrs. Underwood, whom Bartley picked as the first one to hear the record, stepped up to the desk. She was trembling, and almost in tears. The rest of us crowded around the desk. I watched Bartley place the tube in her ears, saw him start the machine, and a second later she staggered. But she recovered herself, and listened; at the completion, her face filled with horror and surprise. In fact, when she dropped the tube she half fell in a chair and sat staring dumbly.

Robert came next, he bearing himself well, bravely trying not to be overcome at the voice of the father that he had been suspected of killing. At the end, the same

astonished and horrified look that had come over the face of his young step-mother passed over his, and he dropped the tube and went over to her side. Then Bartley with a little smile, beckoned to me, saying, "Your turn next, Pelt."

I took the tube and placed it to my ears. He started the machine. For a moment there came only the sound of the motor, and then the voice of John Underwood, clear and concise. It seemed hard to think that the lips that had spoken into the record were now cold, that it was not a living voice I heard. But I forgot that in a second, by the astonishing thing that the voice said. In Underwood's short crisp voice I heard,

"This letter must go by special delivery—Vance, take it up to Eastwood early in the morning, so it will get out"—then came the grinding of the machine for a moment, and then the voice went on,

"August 1st, 1914. Central Trust Co., New York. Frank Hodges. Send down to me by special messenger—" Here there came a pause, a pause that lasted perhaps thirty seconds, though it seemed as many minutes. It was the time when Underwood must have perceived the man in the room, for suddenly the voice spoke again in my ears, this time much louder, filled with the greatest astonishment and anger, and these were the words,

"What the devil, Phelps, are you doing here? I told you I never wanted to see you again."

And then came silence. John Underwood had spoken his last word into a dictaphone.

CHAPTER XXIV

FATE CHEATS THE LAW

"**P**HELPS." The word rang in my ears, even after I had dropped the tube. It seemed almost incredible that I could have heard aright, and that it could have been the lawyer that Bartley had suspected of the crime. For a moment I thought he must have been playing a joke on us, for Phelps, one of the great lawyers of the country, and for years the best friend of Underwood's, could not have killed him. So I thought, but a glance at Bartley, whose face still wore an expression of sadness, showed me that it was so.

And then I wondered where Phelps could be. I had looked at him only a few moments before we gathered around the table, and then he had been sitting in a chair by the window. But after that I had not seen him, and as I looked around the room, my mind still troubled by what I had heard, I was unable to see him anywhere. But where could he have gone ? The door by which we all had entered the library, and the only door into the room, had been in front of me all the time. He had not gone out of the room through the door. What other way was there ? And as I turned once more to look at the chair in which he had been sitting, the curtains by the window, moved by the breeze without, lifted a little, and I saw that the windows were half open from the bottom, with no screen in them. If he had left the room, he must have gone out through the window ; in that moment when the attention of all was centred on the dictaphone he had fled, because he knew what the record would bring forth.

In turn now the chief and the attorney and Judge Grant all listened to the record ; listened with the same astonishment on their faces that the others had shown. They were all through by the time I had given up wonder-

ing what had become of Phelps, and as they turned to Bartley, turned so astonished that none were able to speak, he looked at them all a moment, and then simply nodded. Then, just as Robert was about to speak, Bartley himself spoke.

"Yes," he said, "the name you heard is the man who committed the murder. The machine cannot lie. Those of us that know Mr. Underwood's voice can testify that it was he speaking."

The chief gave a glance around the room, and then said with an excited air, "But where is he?"

"He is gone," said Bartley. "While you were all coming to the table, he dropped out of the window."

The chief started for the door, saying excitedly.

"But he will escape!"

"No," came Bartley's reply, "he won't go very far. Jenkins was outside on watch with the other man I asked the chief to bring up to-night. They both had orders from me to stop any person that tried to escape from the window."

"Then," said the chief in great surprise, "you expected that he would get out of the window?"

Bartley gave a faint smile.

"Yes, that was why I had the screens taken out, and the window thrown open. That was the reason I asked you to come up to the desk, that he might have a chance to escape. If, as I thought, he suddenly discovered that the record would give him away, I figured that if he had the chance he would try to escape, and by trying confess his guilt. I needed that confession. The thumbprint I showed you was a photograph two years old. The end, I trust, has justified the means. My enlarging camera I use for such purposes has never been in Wynecliff Point."

At that moment there rang out on the air the sound of three revolver shots, fired one after the other, as fast as a revolver could be fired. Startled, we all stood listening, but Bartley started for the door with the words, "They have him! That was the signal that I told Jenkins to use."

He was out of the door by this time, and, after one look at him, the rest of us started after him on the run. Out of the great front door we all rushed, down to the front of the house, standing there a moment, only to see Bartley rush to the sea wall. By the great stone steps that led forty feet to the sand below stood a policeman, whom we recognized as one from the town. He was speaking to Bartley as we rushed up.

"We've got him, but I think he is hurt."

"Where is he?" asked Bartley.

The policeman made a sweeping gesture of his hand, and pointed down to the sand below. We rushed to the edge of the wall and peered down into the semi-darkness, forty feet below. It was moonlight, yet rather dark in the shadow of the wall, and it took several moments for us to pick out of the shadows the form of a man, standing by the bottom of the steps. He was bending over an object, that simply seemed a darker shadow than the rest.

Bartley gave one quick look, and shot down the stairs, we after him, all reaching the bottom about the same time. There we found Jenkins, and at his feet, his neck twisted in a strange position, half lying on his side, his white dress shirt front showing white against the shadows, we found Phelps. Bartley did not speak a word, but knelt by the side of the lawyer, examined him a moment, then rose to his feet and said one word, "Dead."

Then came silence, broken by Bartley turning to Jenkins.

"What happened?"

The young officer straightened himself.

"I stayed where you told me, around the corner, never letting my eyes leave the window. After about an hour I saw a man's legs come through and then a man drop on the ground and start to run. The same instant I started after him. I remembered that you told me not to fire, so did not. I think he was going for the steps, trying to get down on the beach. Anyway I reached the top step about the time he did, tried to grab him, and he turned while he was running down the steps and

tried to hit me. Just what happened I don't know, but he must have lost his balance, for he half fell, caught himself, stumbled again, and then fell headlong over the rail. When I reached him he was just as you see him, dead."

Just what took place after that is rather mixed in my mind. I know that everybody tried to talk at once, and that a little later we were all back in the library.

"Mr. Bartley," said the district attorney, "we want to hear the rest. You never told us why he killed Underwood or how you came to suspect him."

Bartley gave a rather feeble smile. No one felt very happy, and he seemed rather more depressed than usual. But he told us to take seats and that he would tell us how he happened to suspect the lawyer. Mrs. Underwood, who seemed rather fagged by the excitement, was reclining on the settle and the rest of us now dropped into the nearest chairs.

"The first time I came in the library," continued Bartley, "in fact, even before that, I knew that the murderer, of course, had in some way got out of the room. When I saw the door, with the key in it, I knew that it could not be that way. The next thing was to figure out the explanation of the locked windows, which, I did as I have told you. From the very first I decided that the person that killed Underwood was some one that he knew. Gradually I eliminated the various people that I knew had been in the library the night of the murder. Now the next question that came up was of course who the person could be that was the last one in the library, and how he could have got in without any one seeing him. I soon found that the front door could not have been locked, despite what Williams said. Vance himself came in after Williams claimed to have locked it. I decided then that the murderer simply came in through the door, and went into the library. That made me think that it was some one that knew the house—in fact, I don't think Phelps intended to kill Underwood just then. Only after he reached the library, and knew that no one saw him come in, did he decide that the time

was ripe. The fact that Underwood talked with the person that was in the room, and talked long enough to smoke a cigar, was one of the things that made me sure that he knew who the man was.

"Speaking about the cigar stumps that I found in the ash tray—there were two, you know, of different brands than Underwood smoked. I found out to-day that they were the same brand that Phelps always used."

Then I remembered how Bartley late in the afternoon had taken two cigars from the pocket of Phelps' over-coat. I saw now why he wished them, and the use he had put them to. But he was speaking.

"I admit that for several days I was troubled by the stories that were told regarding the feeling that existed between Robert and his father." The young man's face flushed at this, but Bartley gave him a kindly smile. "But when I say I was troubled, I do not mean that I suspected him of the crime. From the very first I was sure that he had nothing to do with it. But I was afraid that the evidence might make trouble for him. Try as I could, I was unable to see any light in the case, and the attack that took place on Pelt in the library simply made matters worse. For a while I thought it had something to do with the murder. It was one of the things that puzzled me even down to this afternoon. In fact, gentlemen, I summoned you here to-night for a consultation, not a revelation. True, I suspected Phelps, for John Underwood's will is missing, and he claimed to have had it in his office in New York at the time when Judge Grant and Mrs. Underwood saw it in Eastwood and in this room. I wanted to question him about that, and I wanted witnesses. For Phelps' motive in the deed was concerned with that will—and we did not know where it was, or if it was in existence at all—in fact, we do not know yet. But I found out this afternoon that the attack on Pelt in the library here the next night after the murder had nothing to do with the murderer itself. That is another tale. It is mixed up with the lost three thousand dollars which I was sure at first was also mixed up with the murder, but in the end found was not." He

paused a moment, took a drink of water, and went on :
“ As I say, I felt that whoever killed Underwood was well known to him, but who it could be, I did not know.

“ And then Phelps came on the scene, came down on the train from his Maine camp as soon as he heard of the murder, and it was right there that I began to wonder about him, though I did not suspect him of knowing anything about the crime.

“ What caused you to suspect him ? ” asked Robert.

“ I did not then,” Bartley answered. “ But there was one thing that I wondered about. You remember that the papers had nothing in about the murder till the day after Underwood was killed. We kept the news back. Now Phelps was here the same day—the evening of the same day that the news first came out in the papers he said he saw it in the Portland papers that morning ; told us that was when he first knew of the death of Mr. Underwood. But there was a strange thing. You know that the news of the murder did not reach the New York papers till just as they were going to press. In fact, they only had a word in the morning papers, and got no details till night. I doubted very much if the one morning paper of Portland had a line in about the death of Underwood. I investigated and found out that it had not. I knew the New York papers containing the news of the crime did not reach Portland till about three o’clock in the afternoon, and that the Boston papers reached there about noon. Phelps, in order to get here at the time he did, had to leave Portland at nine-thirty, hours before any paper with the account of Underwood’s death had been sold in the city. I wondered naturally how he would know about his death.”

But the district attorney at this point wanted to know, as he put it, “ Why Phelps, a lawyer of standing, should wish to kill Underwood.”

Bartley smiled at the question, but replied,

“ That was the great question. Till I could find a motive, the other things amounted to nothing. I could not accuse him of a murder and have no reason for it. But little by little the reason came forth. I found on my

trip to New York that Underwood and Phelps had quarrelled. In fact, Underwood's partner told me that Underwood had said that Phelps would never do any more work for him, that he found out that he had used certain securities of Underwood's that were in his possession as collateral in the stock market. Underwood was enabled to regain his securities, but in order to redeem them Phelps had to dispose of his real estate, for the market had gone heavily against him, and the upshot of the deal was that Phelps was virtually ruined. Sullivan threw back his head with a disgusted air.

"But, Mr. Bartley, that's no reason to kill a man."

Bartley simply looked at him, and went on,

"No, not in itself. But you remember the will that had been in Phelps's office. All at once Underwood wanted it, and his lawyer, the man that had been his friend, that had done all his legal business, said he did not know why he wanted it. Then last night I found that Underwood had told Judge Grant here to draw him up a new will, had not consulted his old friend at all, nor named him executor of his estate. That made me certain that Underwood had no more use for Phelps."

He paused, and then continued, "You ask the motive, one that only a lawyer could think of, one that I never have heard of before. You see, Phelps had been named executor in the will that he had drawn up for Underwood. I think that night in the library Underwood again told him he was through with him. I judge also that he told him that he would in a short time have a new will, a will in which a trust company was executor of the estate in the place of Phelps.

"Phelps may or may not have intended to kill him when he came in the room, but at least he had a gun handy, and when he saw a chance to recover all he had lost, he shot him."

"Recover what he had lost," I echoed.

"Yes, Pelt. He may have had the idea that the old will, the one that he had drawn up, was in the safe. In that will he was named as executor. In a day or so there would be a new will, a will in which he was not named

at all. As executor of Underwood's estate, he would have possession of the estate and have to care for it till Robert was twenty-five. The fee that he would receive as executor of an estate the size of Underwood's would run into hundreds of thousands of dollars, while the legal fees that he could charge would be heavy. The estate in his hands for some years, till the youth became twenty-five, also meant heavy charges against the property. No matter which way the estate went, he was sure to receive a large sum of money. In the safe was the will, at least he thought so. He knew that will named him as the executor of the estate, and he was ruined, his money swept away by the stock market. Whatever was to be done, must be done at once. For in a few hours Underwood would have a new will, one in which he was not named, in which a trust company would manage the estate if Mr. Underwood died. So he killed him, killed him to become the executor of the estate, to receive the fees that such a position would bring him."

Mrs. Underwood, with a perplexed look on her face, said :

" But the will has not been found."

" That is true," replied Bartley. " And the fact that we have found no trace of the will is one of the things that I cannot understand. If it was destroyed, and it must have been, for there was no trace of it, and no one had any reason to steal it, we would not presume a business man like your husband would destroy it, before making a new one. Still these business men do queer things at times, and it may be that, knowing he was to make a new will in a few days, he did destroy his old one. Now, if Phelps had found the old will in the safe, if it had been there, he ought to have left it where he found it. That old will named him as executor, and he would not destroy it himself. But it made little difference to him that he did not find a will in the safe. He knew that Robert here would be the one that would have the burden of the estate on his shoulders, and he knew that Robert did not know that they quarrelled. He naturally

assumed that you would ask him, in the event of no will being found, to become administrator of the estate. And in that case the fees and charges would work out the same."

Here he paused, and waited for us to ask him any questions that he might be able to answer. But none of us had any, the motive that he had told us about seemed very clear ; so simple, that I wondered why none of us had not thought of it before. And there seemed no question that Phelps, great lawyer that he had been, must have killed his friend.

"What did that attack on Pelt mean ?" asked Sullivan, "and how did you prove Phelps bought the gun ?"

At this point the chief suddenly rose and left the room.

"As to the first," replied Bartley, "that had nothing to do with the murder. But I found that Phelps was down here with the Underwoods in May. I did not at first try to connect him with the gun till after I had found out the other things. Then to-night I had that messenger boy come down, and look in the library at Phelps, and he said he was the man that sent him to the store for it. Also I think that the quarrel between the two men started the day Phelps bought the gun, for he rode up to the city in the car, and then took a train for New York, a train that pulled out about twenty minutes after the gun was bought. I don't see why he wished the gun at that time, but it might be that even then he was thinking of killing Underwood. In fact, there are several loose ends in this case, the reason he bought the gun then being one. It was not till to-day, when I found that dictaphone, and even late this evening when Pelt found the last record that had been on the machine, that I was sure that I had him. Then it was a mixture of evidence that he might beat in court. But now he has both confessed by his action and paid the debt of blood with his own broken neck."

A few moments after this remark the chief returned.

"I have just searched Phelps," he said. "I thought he might have that will with him. But he had not."

"Perhaps," I said, "he did have it, for he could have taken it that day he looked through the safe and brought it back here to-day and—"

Bartley made a quick move in the direction of the safe. We all watched him in silence as he quickly ran through the combination and swung open the door.

He pulled out the top drawer, eyed it carefully, picked out its contents with both hands and, laying the tumbled papers on a chair, then reached in and produced an envelope from the bottom of the drawer and brought it to the desk, pulling out the contents as he walked. And he smiled whimsically as he spread before us the original and unchanged copy of John Underwood's will.

THE END

